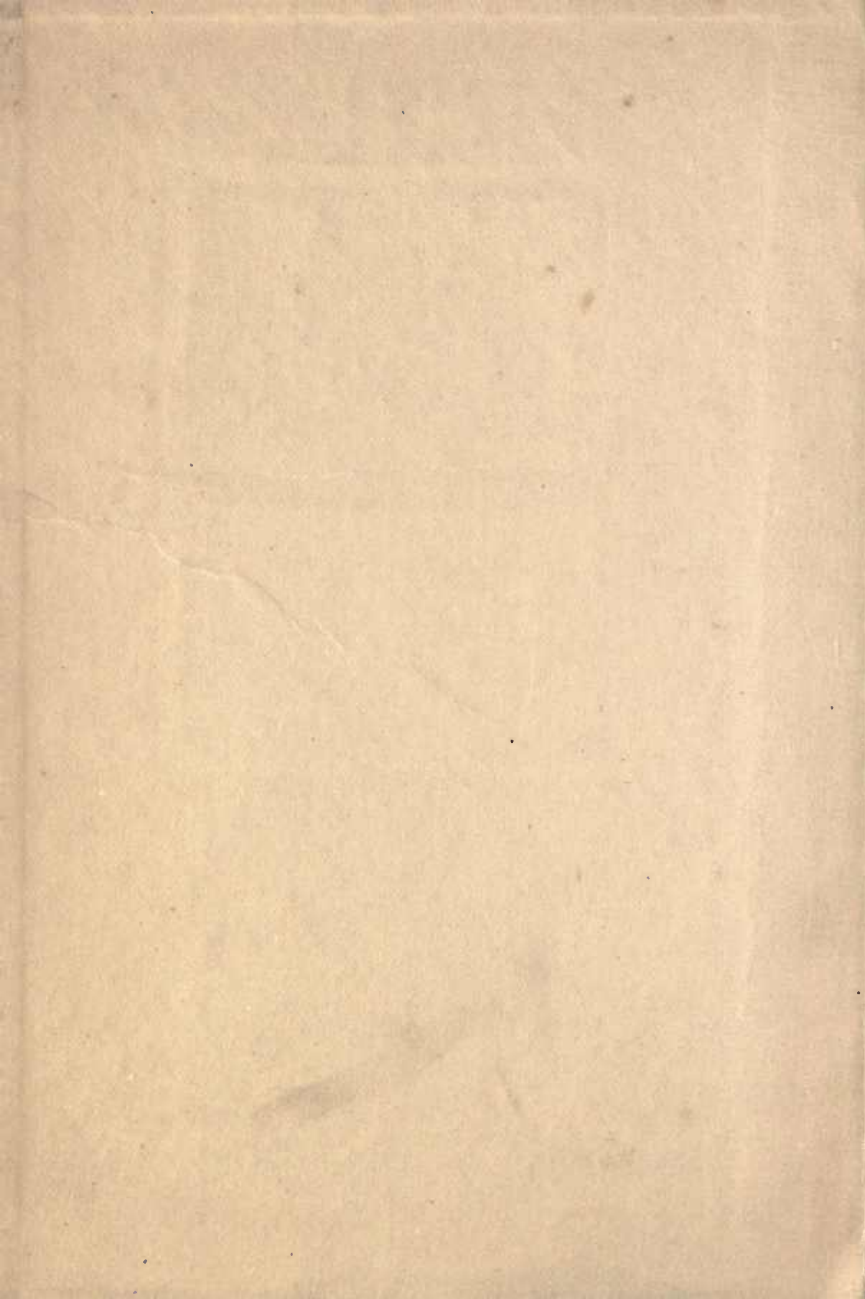
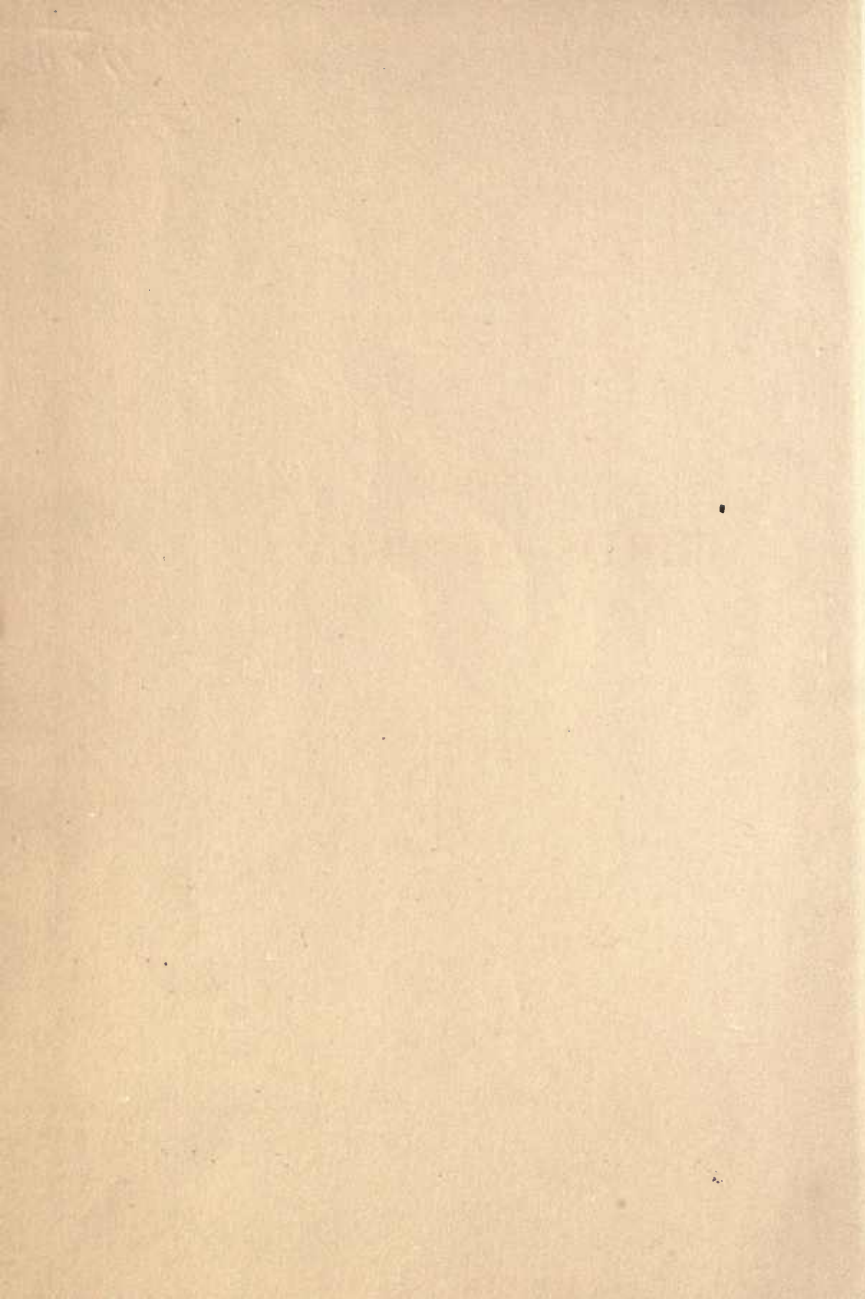


BIRDS
OF PREY

George
Bronson
Howard





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"I couldn't stand it, Burt."

BIRDS OF PREY

BEING

Pages from the Book of Broadway

BY

GEORGE BRONSON-HOWARD

AUTHOR OF

"GOD'S MAN," "SLAVES OF THE LAMP," etc.

Illustrations by

WALLACE MORGAN



NEW YORK

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BY GEORGE BRONSON-HOWARD

NOVELS

GOD'S MAN
BIRDS OF PREY

ROMANCES

SLAVES OF THE LAMP
AN ENEMY TO SOCIETY
SCARS ON THE SOUTHERN SEAS
NORROY, DIPLOMATIC AGENT

PLAYS

THE RED LIGHT OF MARS
THE ONLY LAW
SNOBS
A NIGHT IN SUBTERRANEA

LIBRETTOS

THE PASSING SHOW OF 1912
BROADWAY TO PARIS

PRESS OF
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BROOKLYN, N. Y.

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FOREWORD

SINCE the days when Broadway was as I have written of it here the Great Change has come to many of us who once breathed that hectic air. Service has ennobled many who, true enough to type as they were, and as I have described them, have since had a chance to die worthily even if they lived otherwise. As for myself, I have been estranged from Broadway these many years. Even when it was my habitat it commanded neither affection nor admiration from me.

Circumstances, however, once put me in a position to see it from the inside, and just so I have written of it.

But let none flatter themselves that he or she personally is sufficiently typical to make any of my characters new. All who figure in these pages are combinations of some half-score or so folk of their class. That they run true to form in this book is the last reason in the world for any one person believing him or herself originally described.

I write this while I await the sailing of the ship that will carry me to England to join His Majesty's forces. While you read it, I believe my training will be over and that I shall be in France. There I hope to see something of what the Great Change has wrought in men. God grant I shall measure up to the high standard set by the meanest Tommy of the British Canadians.

GEORGE BRONSON-HOWARD.

On board Steamship 501,
June 3rd, 1918.

Book I
THE PARASITE

BIRDS OF PREY



*Being Pages from the
Book of Broadway*

BOOK I: THE PARASITE

not an "old wives' " tale, it is at least the oldest and the favorite in the Decameron of the Broadway choruses—pity there is no Boccaccio to write it down, that it must be one of a mere Heptameron. All the older girls know it, they who date from the days

of hansom cabs at the stage-door; those days when Wall Street and the House of Lords seemed principally for the purpose of bringing fortune and fame to languid, lineless ladies: days when girls with voices had been superseded by mere shapely beauties; who, in turn, have been thrust forth for diligent dancers. Moreover, too much has been explained in print concerning them, and the Wall Street birds have become gun-shy, the Peerage peacocks no longer find matrimony a necessity. The golden days of '99 have passed: there are poor pickings for the "ponies" of the new régime.

So that, all along the Broadway coast, in the same long, low chorus dressing-rooms where in those "good old days" celebrities were made overnight, "without half my looks,

either"; youthful would-be buccaneers sigh for an adviser like "Con" Phillips to take them to those dizzy heights of stardom Violet Vandam adorns. Or, that Burton Jarvis who carried Lettie Lee to fame. Or that Norman MacKinder who co-stars nowadays with Beth Bohen, or the person known generally as Arcy MacTea, friend of Toya Thiodolf. . . . Which is the longest story of all, for it touches upon the life histories of others besides: Carolus Lang, the money captain; his flighty and unworthy wife; J. Tubman Leeminster, polo-player and member of many clubs. . . . And over it all hangs the ugly shadow of Milton Lazard, parasite; who, though but a peacock, conceived himself foremost among birds of prey.

I. THE PEACOCK'S PROGRESS

THE Shadenham Hotel, a favorite nest for birds of prey, was one of that legion between Longacre and the Circle: a legion that, without the patronage of those whose habits, professions or avocations are inimical to law and morality, would close their doors in a week. So that, though preserving an outward semblance of propriety, the managements must train their susceptibilities and those of their staff not easily to be shocked. For in such places flying figures in thin kimonos are ever to be met with between noon and dawn in the halls; many in such scanty garb even taking the elevator from floor to floor, for there is not much likelihood of meeting within their walls anyone that mere breaches of propriety are likely to annoy. Bell-boys have been trained to ignore the sound of glass crashing and furniture overturning, of shrill imprecations and hoarsely growled oaths, even the sound of falls too muffled to be chairs or tables. Room-clerks learn, after their first report, that the odor they took for cooking opium is only that of some Oriental tobacco; and that no hour is too late for the male visitor to be announced.

But, to the tyro entering the place (the novice, the stranger in New York), there are no outward signs that will prevent any young lady resident from persuading him of her high place in the society of her Southern home, or of her presence in New York for the study of music, painting or dramatic art. Below, the marble floor of the foyer is covered with Oriental rugs, the walls with tapestry or Gobelin burlap. High gilt-encrusted vases and paintings in heavy gilded frames abound. But everything is of that species of imitation "art" at which America excels. The clerk is dapper, the telephone, lift and bell-boys are neatly uniformed. Above, in the apartments—there are few single rooms in such places—there is more imitation "art": art nouveau wallpaper and art mission furniture—sufficient to delude the average half-educated American, reared in a home that has not yet rid itself of an aftermath of horsehair and walnut, that the apartment's resident has "artistic" tastes.

It was in such an apartment on a December afternoon that one girl of the Frivolity chorus came to call upon another; finding her, though the day was far advanced, not yet awake. Nor eke her lord and master, who slumbered on with great snores: while a patient little negro maid waited, and had waited since noon; fearing to move lest she disturb the sleepers. But the young lady visitor had no such scruples, calling loudly from the sitting-room door. The lord and master started up—his eyes heavy with sleep, his mouth dry and unwholesome—protesting profanely in a voice that varied between a deep bass and a high squeak.

"It's time you were up—half-past three," said the caller calmly. In return, she got a growl of semi-recognition from the pajama-clad one, who shook the sleeping figure beside him violently. "Better get out and stop that broad bawling the roof off," he snarled, reaching for the bag of near-alfalfa and

the brown cigarette papers that were always his latest supper and his earliest breakfast.

The girl beside him sat up, her short, scanty blond hair falling untidily about her face. Had her many admirers seen her then, barren of becoming apparel, the tip of her nose red from the cold—for the windows were open; the circles beneath her eyes unerased by make-up, the eyes themselves red-rimmed, her hair lifeless and burnt from overmuch "marcelling," and most of her *coiffure*—"puffs," made-up curls and "switches"—on the dressing-table, they would have failed to recognize the vision that gladdened the restaurants.

As for the parasite, stripped of his fashionable clothes, unshaven, his heavy jowls unrestricted and untamed by a collar, he looked less the part he had given himself to play, more that one nature had assigned him: but, when he rose, to potter over to the coffee percolator which the little negro girl had lit for the fourth time that day, he presented a picture more ludicrous than fearsome. He was like a giant Brownie—a huge head shaped like a coal scuttle, a heavy round stomach and the thinnest of legs and the smallest of feet, which, in one more than six feet tall, made him somewhat of a monstrosity. . . . And so the very youthful visitor giggled; which annoyed the parasite.

"Thirty years of getting my living by my wits, and then to be annoyed by a lot of field mice," he growled heavily. The bass of the growl was not natural; had been carefully assumed for many years to disguise the thin, squeaky staccato of his given voice. He snatched cup and saucer from the trembling Lilliputian negress, and turned on the percolator spigot.

"I came in to show you my new ring," said the caller jubilantly, slipping off one glove and displaying a large cabochon sapphire. "And he's going to give me another just like it, only a ruby. And say, Lily, you know that man Hardesty brought back stage to meet me? Why, that's Kane—Monty

Kane. And he wants me to go to Europe on his yacht with him; and he says if I do he'll put a thousand in the Longacre Bank for me and get Mandelbaum to give me a good part when I come back, and he promised I could have anything I liked in the Paris shops and—"

"He didn't by any chance promise you the Flatiron Building for a chaser, did he?" sneered the parasite, then damned the Lilliputian for her vile brew of Java. But there was another knock on the door before the caller could give her indignant answer, and a third girl, a thin, anæmic creature, a gray crêpe kimono wrapped closely about her, came in. She was followed by a fourth, healthy and red-blooded, smartly dressed for the street. She and the first caller, who had all the splendid color and exuberance of youth, presented a striking contrast to the two girls in negligee.

"Having breakfast?" asked the healthy newcomer greedily. She sat herself down and, taking up a slice of bread just cut by the Lilliputian, spread it with jam and poured herself a cup of coffee. "Take some more," urged the parasite unpleasantly; "rub it on your chest or in your hair if you can't eat it. Go on. Don't you ever eat at your own expense?" To which the uninvited banqueter only winked, being too busy wolfing bread and jam to speak.

"I wish I could eat like Sarah," said the other newcomer in a peevish, discontented voice.

"You ought to wish you were dead and get it over with," advised the man. "I'll bet my good right arm and my best eye you got another wail about your tough luck to let out of you. Why come *here* with your troubles? Life looks tough enough to a man just out of the hay without a flock of pin-headed broads busting in on him; and when they ain't eating him out of house and home, they're *driving* him out with graveyard groans or some lying yarn or other. Why am *I* the goat?"

"If you're referring to me, Milton Lazard," said loftily the young girl of the new ring, "I'll have you know I'm not in the habit of telling lies. Don't judge others by yourself, you poor thing"—which at that time was Miss Toya Thiodolf's idea of repartee. "Look, girls"—and the history of the ring and the yachting offer was repeated. "You saw the earrings, didn't you, Lily?" The mistress of the apartment nodded, but the anæmic girl betrayed some doleful interest, and the perpetually hungry Miss Anna Drum, having eaten all she could lay hands on, greedily eyed the sparkling diamond and sapphire drops.

"You couldn't horn me in on the trip some way, could you?" she asked, in intense anxiety. "You know I could help you a lot picking out dresses and jewelry. I used to work in the swellest department store in Chi—first I was cloak-model, then selling junk—tortoise-shell combs and baby pins and rhinestone buckles and such; and I got to know the real jewelry, being so friendly with the men clerks—"

"And getting them to buy you large hunks of nourishment, or I'm a mangy yellow pup," put in Lazard sourly. "There was chuck concealed somewhere in any friendship *you* ever had."

Miss Drum laughed in loud boisterousness as one who has been paid a compliment. "How about it, Toya, dear?" she continued eagerly. "When do you go?"

"Oh, Arcy wouldn't let me," said little Miss Toya, nestling her smooth olive skin against the soft fur of a huge pillow muff. Anna interpreted her sigh of philosophical resignation with a long intake of breath.

"Well—of all the mean men!" she said. "I suppose he's afraid of losing you if you ever get away from him and live like a lady."

"Lady?" jeered Lazard, his third cup of coffee having translated his earlier growl into a mock-genial satyr's smile.

"Lady! She couldn't disguise herself as a lady with that Slavonic map of hers tipping the gaff, and those heavy hoofs of hers. And she better not invite you, Drum, unless she wants the rest of the passengers to starve on that tugboat trip of hers to Coney Island."

"Tugboat! Coney Island!!" cried Toya passionately. "Why, you poor thing, you!!!"

"Oh, let her alone, Milton," urged the other half of the household.

"Thirty years making my living by my wits and then got to listen to a heavy-headed slab-footed chorus girl talk about passing up yacht trips to Europe and thousands in the bank; just because some thick-headed lover says so," said Lazard in moody wrath. "Why—"

"He says it's best in the end," explained Toya, with the air of one who agrees, that she is defending the moonshine of a madman. "Says that once you give in to those rich fellows they don't have any more use for you."

"Oh, they pay for your entertaining conversation, do they—for the honor of being seen with a lot of pin-headed broads? Don't make me laugh!" returned the man. This time his bitter scorn held a more personal reason, for if this heresy took root in the mind of Lily Lamotte, he saw himself without the where-withal with which to amuse himself in a certain White Light restaurant, where every night he played Sir Oracle (in motley) to the court of youths and others like himself who gathered there.

"He says, Arcy does," went on little Miss Toya, "that sort of thing's all right for girls who haven't got the brains to do anything else. But a girl who's smart doesn't have to . . ."

Lazard rejoiced that this went unheard by Lily, who had retired to turn the water for her bath. "Oh, and who's got brains?" he snarled savagely. "If yours ever grew the size of a flaxseed you'd blow up. If these Johns who're looking

for something lighter than air 'ud only examine your head, they'd find it all right."

Delighted with having aroused his ire—for she hated him beyond endurance for many such contemptuous appraisals—Miss Toya Thiodolf continued in calm, judicial tones: "Arcy says a fellow hasn't got any right to have a girl unless he can better her, unless he can teach her to do something she can't do herself. And he says that no man with any self-respect could love a girl that he shared with anybody. He says a real man wants his girl to be *his* girl, or else he don't care very much for her, and if a girl had any sense she'd see that and know that kind of fellow's only with a girl for what he can get . . ."

"Half an orange in the morning and half the room and half a sack of tobacco a week—I suppose I ought to give Lily trading stamps for paying so high for me," snarled Lazard, in mighty wrath. "And does this virtuous little guy of yours believe you got that ring and those earrings and that taxi charge account just because that John's crazy about the sound of your voice?"

"Of course a thing like *you* wouldn't believe it," she responded loftily; "but that's because it's out of your *class*. Arcy says if Lily had a chance, if she didn't have *you*, she could afford to string fellows along, too. But it's just like anything when you need cash, he says—you don't get much of it. You're a fine-looking object for a girl to cheapen herself for! *She* ought to have *her* head examined."

Anna Drum, who had profited herself of this colloquy to wolf several slices of bread and jam and drink the remaining coffee, laughed boisterously again; and the thin, anæmic girl, who was in a like case with Lily, nodded in gloomy conviction. Lazard looked from one to another, his huge moon face purpling.

When he turned he saw that a stranger was in the room

—a young man, lacking only an inch or so of six feet but hardly sizable alongside the huge bulk of Lazard, dressed foppishly according to Broadway standards: his clothes more usual to Fifth Avenue. For those were the days of huge padded shoulders; of trousers wide enough for two at the hips and too narrow for one at the ankles; of collars that closed tightly, showing only a wisp of necktie below; of goose-bill shoes; when the average American was a discernible freak, blocks away, in foreign countries. Lazard wore all these eccentricities and slashed fold-over pockets, heavy coat cuffs with rows of stitching, and turn-ups to his trousers fully a foot wide, besides. The stranger, wearing none of them, seemed to Lazard badly dressed and insignificant.

His identity was immediately established by the trustfully adoring eyes of Miss Toya Thiodolf; and the two men measured each other as do two stranger dogs, neither coming to any flattering conclusion.

"This is Arcy, girls," said little Miss Toya, exhibiting him with even a greater pride than she had shown the ring. The sex instinct plays strange pranks, and these two, alien to one another in class, race, breeding and education, were each desperately infatuated with the other. Lazard could see that she was making unfavorable comparisons between her cherished one and himself, which superinduced one of his usual sardonic speeches.

"So this is the famous adviser of indigent chorus molls—the guy who's got a mortgage on the brain-market?"

Arcy did not shine in such exchanges of compliments, knew it, so only smiled deprecatingly. "Come, Kittens," he said to Toya; "you've got to try on some clothes this afternoon, you know, and you've got your French lesson and your music. . . . I'm trying to teach her it's best to cut out this Broadway habit of buying a dozen ready-made suits instead of having one made by a good tailor that'll look well

until it wears out," he explained to the others, and, nodding, he took Toya off.

"Say, Lily," said Lazard, as that young woman reentered the room, "you missed it—you missed seeing a little guy with eyes wide apart just like a smelt, and broad just like a toothpick: that little Slav chorus girl's lover who's going to get you all rich—why, he couldn't take a handful of water outa the East River without getting an icicle down his back. It takes some stupid broad like that little Slav to fall for such a titmouse. The more I see of these *smart* fellows, the more I realize how lucky *you* are to grab a guy like me. I don't know what it is makes me stick—just habit, I guess."

And, having reestablished himself in her estimation by this monumental self-assurance and hint of insecurity as to her possession of him, he closed the curtain, and, scorning a bath, began to array himself in those garments that compelled the attention and won the admiration of a certain section of Broadway.

II. THE TRAINING OF THE HAWK

ARCY MACTEA, christened Robert Cameron MacThyndall, his nickname due to his habit of signing first correspondence then newspaper contributions with his initials R. C. MacT., was careful to repress the disgust that his experience in the Lamotte-Lazard establishment had wrought within him; having learned by the experience of others that there was no surer way to lose the average woman than by preaching morality to her. He took another tack with Miss Toya, for whom he cared quite as much as she for him; though he took good care not to betray this.

"Very cheap," said he, taking a monogrammed cigarette from a monogrammed case of gold. A part of his method of inspiring the confidence of strangers was to possess elaborate

and costly accessories in "strictly good form." "Very cheap, my dear Kittens. You shouldn't get too familiar with such people. You're judged by your companions in New York; and if you're seen in company with a girl whose telephone number is on the lists of all the club operators, well . . ." He spread his hands with a deprecatory gesture. "The hotel, too: somebody might see you going in there—"

"I only went in to show her my ring," said Toya defensively. "She was awfully nice to me when I was green in the show business. And I wanted to make *him* look cheap. I wanted Lily to see, if he was so *smart*, why don't he show *her* how to get rings. I hate that Milton Lazard—always acting like he's somebody and smarter than other people, and he's less than nobody at all."

They had entered the waiting taxicab, and Toya ordered the driver to go through the Park before heading for her tailor's address. "The Lazard kind flourishes here in New York like nowhere else," Arcy went on. "That's because nobody knows anybody—or anything. It's just pure cheek, and keeping up appearances, that wins you anything here. If you're modest and don't dress your part, you land in Harlem and stay there. But I can't understand this Lazard, if he's got any brains at all, letting that girl do what she does. I suppose he don't care: he figures he'll just use her until something better comes along and then drop her. By the bye, I hear he's horned himself in somehow with that crazy, flighty, dyed and painted old woman, Mrs. Carolus Lang. I remember him now at her reception the other night when I went to write it up."

"That Milton Lazard—at *her* place! Why, how on earth did he? She's a *society* woman," gasped Toya; and Arcy laughed tolerantly. "But she *is*," insisted the girl: "she's always coming to our show and sitting in a box with lots of young society men—don't I *see* her?"

"She pays the bills, my dear Kittens," explained Arcy: "boxes and private supper-rooms and orchestras and ragtime entertainers. And New York is full of young society men. They come here from other cities with a few good letters of introduction and a dress suit. They make a good appearance, so they get jobs as brokers' clerks or selling stock or something down in the Street, and they always 'dance beautifully' and have 'charming manners'; and get in sometimes with the 'brass-band set'—the bunch that are always having their names in the paper for doing nutty things—even to the 'small affairs.'" All of which was the merest jargon to this child of the lower West Side; where still dwelt her honorable and upright foreign parents, from whom she carefully concealed any such acquisitions as her new jewelry on her Sunday-afternoon visits.

"So," went on Arcy instructively, "when these fellows want to enjoy themselves along Broadway, they get on the string of some rich outsider who pays for their pleasure. They're hired by Mrs. Lang just like the nigger orchestra. As for her being in *society*"—he laughed—"her husband might be because he's a really big man—and *being* that, he doesn't care any more for it than he cares for her, and he lives over in Europe somewhere, collecting pictures. But she's quite 'impossible'—as *they* say. Her foolish-looking dyed hair and her horrible white, vicious old face might be overlooked, but she hasn't the brains to make her vice anything but cheap and repulsive. A fellow like Lazard could just about appeal to her—"

"O-oh," said Miss Toya angrily, "I'll tell Lily!"

"Don't be an ass," he advised; "can't you see getting rid of him would be the best thing that ever happened to her?"

"I know, but she *loves* him," argued Toya.

"Yes, and children love to lick stove polish and puppies

like to eat shoe blacking, but it isn't good for them," Arcy returned.

"But I'd *like* to do it—I hate him so," insisted Toya. But—Arcy's brows contracting—she hastened to take his arm and murmur endearments and apologies. "I won't if you don't want me to," she promised.

"He'd explain his way out of it: a woman always believes what she wants to believe; you'd only make enemies of both of them. They'd be telling stories around about you that Leeminster might hear—about your going around with me, for instance. You were very foolish to show those earrings and that ring, anyhow; but I knew there wasn't any use telling you not to wear them—might just as well try that Joshua trick with the sun as tell a woman not to put on the newest thing she's got—even if it's on a desert island and there's nobody but the birds to see her. But you didn't say anything about Monty Kane and that European trip, did you?"

"Oh, *no*, Arcy," she protested, but she protested too solicitously and he shook his head, keeping his temper with an effort.

"All right, if you want to lose Leeminster," he said: "you know that about slander loving a shining mark; and slander comes from envy. If you make those chorus-girl friends of yours too envious, they'll surely start lying about you to all the stage-door Johns, and it won't be a week before Leeminster hears. And then, good night, Leeminster!"

"I wouldn't care a bit," she pouted: "I'm tired of listening to him tell me all those foolish things about being his 'little white angel on a pedestal' and his 'fragrant unplucked flower' and all that stuff. I feel so uncomfortable. And he looks at you so: just like—well, I don't know what, but funny! If he ever kisses me, I'm through with him—there's just something about him I can't stand—"

"Well, I never told you to go around with him," returned Arcy: "you knew him before you knew me. But since you're doing it, I only showed you how to get some of those things you're always complaining about because you haven't got. He's playing a game with you: I simply showed you how to play back. It doesn't do *me* any good."

"Oh, I know that, Arcy," she hastened to say; "but it's so tiresome for us not to be able to be together more." She snapped her little teeth viciously. "He'll have to pay dearly for *that!*"

The taxi drew up before her tailor's. "I do wish I could get something *big* like Violet Vandam did from that Perine and then tell Leeminster good-night," she said gloomily. "But I hate to give up my taxicab account, and where would I get the money to go to tailors like Koenig and places like Madame Marguery's for dresses if he didn't let me send the bills to him? And—" She looked at the sapphire ring almost as she would have looked into her lover's eyes.

"I'm not telling you to do it—you suggested it yourself," said Arcy impatiently. "Don't try to put the blame on me and say I was so jealous I robbed you of things I couldn't give you myself. I know you women. You want somebody else to make your minds up for you, so you won't have to reproach yourself if things go wrong. Go on in and try your suit on."

"You go ahead and drive anywhere you want to while I'm in there," she urged eagerly.

He shook his head, but concealed his distaste for the proposal: that was quite a different thing from riding with her at another man's expense because *he* could offer her only street-cars, to which he did not share her great aversion. "You go ahead with your appointments, and call me up after the theater," he said.

"And you'll be at your place, waiting for me?" she asked anxiously. He nodded, then strode off down the Avenue.

III. CUCKOOS AND CUCKOLDS

"It's all very well for you to be so all-fired moral. But if she were your girl and you were in my position you'd do just the same thing. You see, I'm crazy about her, Bobbert. And it's the old half-a-loaf stuff—understand?"

The explanation to his friend of his relations with Miss Thiodolf had been brought about because of Arcy's refusal to sup at Curate's—the famous restaurant which his hometown friend very much desired to see; and in the company of one like Arcy who called celebrities by nicknames. So annoyed had he been by Arcy's stubbornness that, sooner than bring about a breach, Arcy had been impulsive enough to acquaint him with his reasons: Toya was supping there with Leeminster. This confidence he immediately regretted when he saw looks of shock, pain and disgust mingle on the face of young Mr. Branch. In the society of the small Southern town, the birthplace of both, there was nothing even slightly analogous to Arcy's present equivocal position.

"If *I* were in your place I wouldn't wait a minute," said Branch indignantly, finding his voice again. "I'd either make her give up *him* or me. If she hesitates she can't care very much for you—"

"But you don't get the angle," interrupted Arcy irritably, "the viewpoint of her class: she can't see why she can't have us both as long as the other affair's platonic. And she sees to it, I'm sure of that. His letters are enough."

"*You read another man's letters!*" asked Branch in a rising tone.

"Oh, my God—cut out that superior attitude! Listen—you're not in Greenborough, where life is laid out on simple lines. This is that large and well-known city surrounded by water and money, where things are complex.

"It's these rich men," he went on, scowling, more uneasy

at Branch's silence than at his protests; "why can't they stick to their own class? But no! They've got to have their own women and everyone else worth having, too—if money will do the trick. And they've got a patience that's wonderful. And cunning—say, they go after these girls in the show business and in the shops and artists' studios just like they go stalking big game. They're not satisfied to take the experienced ones—oh, no! They want youth, and, if possible, innocence. That stirs their jaded blood. And they don't care how long they stalk or how much they spend or how low they descend."

"That doesn't make *your* end of it any more decent just because *they're* rotten. You ought to forbid her to have anything to do with them."

"Listen, Bod," said Arcy, losing his patience and pounding the table; "you don't seem to realize what living in New York means. These girls get twenty a week. That would give them everything in Greenborough: they could live in nice neighborhoods and have nice things to eat and nice clothes and everything. Here it means living in a dirty street, in a dirty apartment-house with paper walls and no privacy, with the smell of leaking gas and bad cooking in the halls—or else miles out in the suburbs where they have to take crowded Subway or Elevated trains late at night and stand for men giving them the eye and crowding up against them in the seats and speaking familiarly, and doing about everything else to make them feel cheap and common—when they're as pretty as Toya is. And then a walk, alone, through a lonely neighborhood at midnight. So that part of it's impossible. Then there's boarding-houses: decent ones where you have any food fit for human beings cost at least twelve a week—and for a hall room at that. Which leaves her eight dollars to dress on and for carfares. Well, she might get away with that, but there's three whole months in the year when the show business is prac-

tically suspended, so money has to be saved for that. Precious few are lucky enough to get into a success like 'The Bonbon Girl' every season. Failures mean three to eight weeks of rehearsals without pay. Then if a girl doesn't want to leave New York, she must rehearse for three or four shows a season, not counting the intermissions between jobs. While on the road they get twenty-two dollars per—they raise them a little—and it's almost impossible, traveling, for a girl to have a clean bathroom and a clean bed and decent food. It would be all right if they weren't thrown in touch with a life of luxury all the time. But they are."

"I'm not thinking about her: it's about you, Arcy," began his friend defensively. "You—"

"But I'm trying to *explain me*," exploded the exasperated Arcy. "Those rich fellows deliberately make these girls dissatisfied with the way they've been brought up. If the girl's a nice young thing, on the lookout to defend herself as mamma has taught her, they get the theater manager to introduce them in the most polite, respectful sort of way. A lot of them put money into shows just for such privileges. Then they take her to tea some place where she feels shabby and badly dressed among a lot of idle, gaudy women. And he sends his car to take her home after the theater some nights. And pretty soon he tells her he knows some *modiste* who could make clothes that would just suit her: he'll introduce her and the shop will trust her. Then he says he hates to think of her eating at that cheap boarding-house or in those hash-houses—or home where mother cooks cornbeef and cabbage. Some hotel or restaurant advertises in some Wall Street paper he owns or has a share in (generally a lie, that, but it's a recognized part of the system) and he takes out the advertising in restaurant bills. And, as he never uses it all up, it won't be costing him one penny if she signs checks there for every meal she eats every day. Same way about a taxicab account.

"And so it goes on—they've got a thousand tricks: the game's been worked out as scientifically as chess. There's the friend-gone-abroad, saves-money-if-she-lives there, have-to-get-a-caretaker-for-apartment-if-she-don't, dodge. Anyhow, if they really go seriously after some young girl, no matter how touchy she might be about accepting money, in a few weeks they've got her used to eating expensive food, taking a taxi to go a block, sitting around in smart restaurants, wearing Paris clothes—and, maybe, living in a beautiful apartment. Now what a chance they're ever going back to smelly Harlem flats or cheap boarding-houses, to being jostled and insulted in crowded street-cars, to wearing little cheap ready-made suits and imitation lace collars! You read about it in books, Bobbert, but it doesn't happen in life, believe me. The girl does one of two things: she either becomes his mistress—which means she'll last with him a few months or a few years, and then has to hunt another; or else, if she's clever, she invents some excuse for putting him off and thinks up some other way of getting his money. And if the last happens, he hollers 'blackmail,' and calls her every kind of name. After he's deliberately taught her to need the things. A hot lot of sports they are!"

"I agree with you," gasped Branch. "Good God—what people!"

"Well, that was the way with Toya," Arcy pursued. "If she hadn't met me, she'd have fallen for Leeminster, I suppose. There's a fine young hypocrite. Belongs to Uplift Leagues and Civic Betterment Societies and Anti-Boss Politics—has a reputation as spotless as the driven snow; passes the plate every Sunday in one of the fashionable churches—a vestryman, I think; and makes speeches at silk-stockings political meetings about 'Down with immorality. Drive the women off the streets. Put out the red lights.' Those fellows can't understand why anybody should want to be im-

moral but themselves. But they don't call their way of doing things immoral. Oh, my, no! Immorality, my dear Bobbert, paints its face very thickly and wears loud clothes and doesn't go to church."

"I'm glad I stayed in Greenborough," said Branch indignantly.

"Everybody there keeps too good a watch on one another for much dishonesty or immorality," was Arcy's cynical answer. "I guess it about comes down to that, Bobbert. And that goes for countries as well as people. Switzerland has the most honest government as well as the most moral people—it's the smallest. And the United States, which is the largest, has the most dishonest government, and—"

"Don't say that about our people, Arcy," Branch interrupted. "America's not New York, you know."

"It's New York and Chicago and San Francisco and the big cities, though, that influence the rest of the country," Arcy replied gloomily. "Look at me, for instance. Down in Greenborough, I had the highest sort of a sense of honor. Why? Because that was the standard. I come up here and find the only standard is being a 'smart fellow.' And being smart means getting money. . . . You know, I can even understand those fellows who live off women, now. Not that I haven't just as much contempt for them as you have," he hastened to add before Branch could break in with a shocked exclamation; "I saw one of them to-day—the worst kind they breed, I guess; and my disgust at being in the same room with him almost made me spit on him. He *was* a low specimen. . . . But take a fellow who means well but who's just weak, and put him in my position. (This is my day off or I wouldn't be sitting around talking to you, bet your boots on that.) Here I work on the *Argus* about twelve hours a day; hardest kind of work reporting is—chasing all over the city following a dozen ends to a story, seeing a hundred people a day, snatch-

ing a sandwich and a cup of coffee for dinner, generally, then off again for half the night, sometimes *all* night if a late story breaks loose and you have to get it for the lobster edition—the late one. No extra pay for overtime in our business, either. Well, then I meet Toya and go and have supper somewhere—that's *my* first real meal, and my first chance to enjoy myself. And the only places open are the all-night restaurants.

“Now take a man like that who's got a girl. They get home past daybreak, and he's supposed to be at the office by eleven. Now figure—the alarm clock goes off and he's dead to the world, but he has to drag his heavy head off the pillow and forget his aching body and snatch a cup of coffee and off. And every time she says: ‘Oh, dearest, take a day off. Get some sleep. You're killing yourself. Sleep until two, then we'll go for a ride and have lunch out in the country.’ I guess that sounds rotten! I wouldn't listen, because I'm looking forward to a career; but imagine some fellow who hasn't got much strength of character. He does. Then he listens again, and finally he loses his job. She says: ‘Don't worry, dear, we won't starve.’ Well, he gets another job, and this time he isn't so scared of losing it. The next time he loses it he don't hurry getting another. They drive around and go into the country as she said, and go to professional matinées and get up late and read novels and what not. Well, finally, the last time he's out, he has such a bad ‘rep’ for unreliability it's hard to get in again; and he takes that for a sop to his manhood: he tells himself ‘I *tried*, didn't I?’ every day. But, really, he's enjoying himself loafing around, having all he had when he worked, and not having to work. And, pretty soon, he says: ‘What fools fellows are to work themselves into the grave for that little bit of money I made!’ He's thinking about how easily the girl borrowed a century note from some rich man.

"Well, that can't keep up, though. Pretty soon they pawn her jewelry. Then, he don't ask her any questions as to where the money comes from. . . . And all the while he's kidding himself the big opportunity of a lifetime is going to come and hunt him up, and he was wise to wait for it instead of wasting his time on a small job. For most of 'em make less than I do and have to be at the office at *nine* o'clock, not eleven. That's where these vice-prevention societies are all wrong about these 'cadets.' Women make as many as they make what the papers call 'white slaves.' It's funny, Bobbert, but there are very few people in the world that deliberately start out to be vicious. Most of them wouldn't know the truth about themselves if you showed 'em: they'd be insulted. They've been kidding themselves too long."

"I hope you'll remember that in your own case," said Branch significantly; then added hurriedly, fearing he had implied too much: "But what about this fellow you saw to-day—if so few are really vicious?"

"Oh, he was an exception," returned Arcy, frowning. "What a big rat he was—pugh!—don't let's talk about him. . . . But what do you mean—in my case? What do I gain from Toya seeing Leeminster? I'd be better off if she didn't. The jewelry she gets doesn't help me, and I'm on pins and needles whenever I have to ride in the taxi with her. And I have my position just as I always had, and when we're out together I pay the bills. We don't even live together. Don't get any wrong ideas, Bob. *I*, personally, don't want Toya to string Leeminster. But I'm not so selfish as to take away her chance of getting a lot of valuable jewelry that will make her independent so if she's out of a job she won't have to stop her French lessons and all that. The poor kid quit school at thirteen and went into a department store. That jewelry will pay for the education that's so necessary if she's ever

going to get up in the profession. *My wages are just about enough to support me.*"

"Oh, well, I dare say you've got plenty of excuses, Arcy," yawned Branch: "you'd have to have for you to mix up a game like this." He looked at his watch. "Well, old man, as this is my last night in New York, I'm going to see Curate's: I wouldn't dare go back to Greenborough without having seen it—and all the celebrities."

"All the *celebrities* catch the last train for the country," growled Arcy: "they don't hang around supper places; they've got something better to do. It's people who're trying to *be* celebrities. But if you're determined, I suppose it's up to me. Come on."

IV. THE OWLS

CURATE'S, famous from sea to sea, the scene of farces, novels, a thousand short stories and a million newspaper paragraphs, was in its heyday at that time, and in full flower the hour they entered it—past midnight. All the pretty faces and shapely forms that the audiences of Broadway musical shows had admired earlier in the evening seemed to be here; their escorts, for the most part, middle-aged men whose assumed rakishness sat ill upon them, and younger ones who, it seemed, had found it necessary to drink heavily that it might not be unbecoming to them also: both sorts (in the main) of the unmistakable "Avenue" brand, their impeccable dress-coats, collars, ties, flat-heeled pumps or shoes, and the width of their dress-trousers braid, exact duplicates each of the other. It seemed a sort of uniform. To be in the slightest degree original, to vary from type by so much as a larger or extra shirt stud, marked the outsider: it was that dreadful and unforgivable calamity, "bad form": a different viewpoint from that day of real elegance in grooming, the Regency, when he

with the taste (or the valet) to invent attractive novelties of attire was the most fashionable: different from the viewpoint of any rational age. But, when conventional men hold power, conventionality must be capitalized, must become a virtue. And every one of these conventionally attired men was a member of exclusive clubs, the holder of a name honored by ancestor-worshippers or by Dun or Bradstreet, a part of past or contemporary history.

"It's funny how quickly New York turns individuals into types," Arcy had once said to Toya. "You know those hollow lead moulds that confectioners pour hot candy in and take it out shaped like a man. There must be one of those around here. Those fellows come from everywhere: from all classes; not half of them are born gentlemen, not a quarter born New Yorkers. But, all of a sudden, there's another thin-legged stork looking exactly like all the rest. One tailor in New York not only makes clothes for those fellows, but picks out shirts, ties, boots—everything that goes with it. They'd as soon be seen walking the Avenue in their pajamas as wearing something he didn't approve."

J. Tubman Leeminster was not one of the latter sort, Arcy, despite his dislike, was compelled to admit. The Leeminsters dated from the days when "York" was substituted for "Amsterdam." So far as the "Street" was concerned, no Leeminster had ever been forced to take money from the unhallowed hands of its original owners: Leeminsters left all that sort of thing to more recent people; or to those unfortunates of their own class who were burdened with *bourgeois* ideas about love in connection with marriage. Frankly, like embarrassed peers, the Leeminsters had long since looked on marriage as a vocation. They acknowledged their inability to cope with climbing commercials on their own ground: besides, what need, when such would presently invade theirs? So they allowed the new people to make the money, and then,

as a great favor, agreed to share it. For three generations, Leeminsters, male and female, had exchanged social position for large quantities of newly laid golden eggs which it then became their lifework to scatter in the manner most agreeable to them, and most disagreeable to their constitutions. With the result that this later Leeminster was a young man of singularly vacuous countenance, scanty hair and an unhealthy pallor.

To see this person with Toya was like a burning brand thrust into the face of Arcy MacTea. "Damn him!" he said viciously. "To think I have to sweat twelve hours a day for forty dollars a week, and he gets everything just for being kind enough to live!" He checked himself, remembering. "He doesn't, though, Bobbert," he added, with a grin: "he's got to marry now he's had his fling—Miss Mae Hefflefinger, the daughter of the fellow who makes those hams you see advertised so much. 'Mae'! I'll bet he shivers every time he see that Riverside Drive spelling. She'll be 'Mary'—or 'May' at least—on the wedding announcements; see if she isn't."

"And he has the nerve to be seen at supper with another girl?" asked Branch.

"Oh, Bobbert, you weary me," protested his friend. "Curate's is as far from Canary's as the Argentine Republic. The women of his set don't come over to Broadway except to go slumming. And then they pride themselves on being Continental; and, in Paris, if the Faubourg St. Germain crowd goes to Montmartre and sees a duke with a pretty *figurante*, they realize it isn't *his* fault: *they* aren't expected to *be* there; so they pretend they never saw him there next time they meet—officially. . . . You're thinking of Greenborough again; where there's only two hotel restaurants and everybody has to act like they're in church."

Arcy was talking rapidly, almost feverishly; for Toya was

looking toward him; and he must present an appearance of indifference. He knew her nature well enough to realize that one of his strongest holds on her was her belief that he absolutely lacked jealousy—which made her suspect he did not sufficiently love her, and increased her own infatuation. So he resolutely refused to catch her eye. To all appearances, he might not have known of her presence. Now he threw one leg over the other, which turned him completely from sight of her, and continued his animated monologue.

“Look at this bunch in here to-night. There might be a dozen ‘professionals’ eating after the show because they’re hungry; and a dozen more out-of-town people, Harlemites and Brooklynites—though the head-waiter don’t give many seats to people he don’t know, not at this hour, when the tipping’s at its height. The remainder are just Dyak head-hunters. Look at these girls. Hardly one’s twenty-five. This kind of men want chickens—‘flappers’ *they* call ‘em. When girls get past the flapper stage, if they haven’t laid something by, it’s them for the college boys. That’s the first step downward, and it’s fast after that, unless they marry or make good on the stage. And these fellows don’t *want* ‘em to make good and get independent and choose whoever they want. They discourage it. ‘What do *you* want to stick around a stuffy theater for, and sit in cold dressing-rooms?’ they say. ‘A pretty girl like you don’t need to. Most of these actresses have to get ahead because they’re so unattractive to men. But you . . .’ And, will you believe it, most of those poor conceited little fools fall for it. I heard one of them pitying the best-known woman star in America, because she saw her plainly dressed, hurrying along on foot, while this girl in a flaming gown rode past in a motor car. Pitied her! Imagine!” And Arcy burst into a boisterous laugh which was only half real.

But his merriment fled instantly when a uniformed page

was heard moving near and murmuring as if to the ears of all at large. "Message for Mr. MacThyndall. Message—" Arcy called him.

"You, sir? Telephone message," said the page, and let one eyelid droop the merest trifle, which he knew would increase the size of his tip: the note's only connection with the telephone being that it had been written at the operator's switch-board. Lacking the easier opportunities of the foreign supper places where men and women have a common retiring-room, Broadway had long ago hit on this method of communicating with some other person in the room without arousing the suspicion of escorts. One simply excused oneself to telephone, and there wrote the message, which was delivered as if it had come over the wire.

"Pardon me, Bob—I wonder how they knew I was here?" said Arcy hypocritically, as he opened the envelope. "Go next door to Noel's, dearest," he read. "I'll pretend a headache or something and get him to put me in a taxi, and I'll just drive around the block and come back. How's the Kitten's papa, precious?" The note concluded with a row of "x's," the approved method for the germless transmission of kisses. Guiltily, Arcy tore it up.

"Lucky she wasn't with me when I got *that*," he said aloud, pretending wholesale roguishness. "That girl must have telephoned every place along Broadway. . . . Well, I suppose I'll have to go, Bobbert."

He noted, grimly, that his friend, who had taken so strong a moral stand on his other peccadilloes, seemed to consider this deception—as he supposed it—of a trusting mistress quite the merriest sort of jest. "And she sitting here all the time!" Branch chuckled. "Say, hasn't this one got a friend? Can't you butt me in somehow?"

Arcy was beginning to weary of Branch. They had been school and college chums, to be sure; but Branch had not

progressed in worldly wisdom. Even had Toya's supposed rival been real, and had she had a complaisant friend, Arcy would not have introduced her to the Greenborough man. Such sophisticated maidens only suffered boredom when they were well paid for it.

Then, with a sudden blush for his stupidity, Arcy realized that Branch's viewpoints were identical with those of the very men he had been excoriating: Branch was the average American: what an ass he (Arcy) had been to try to explain the philosophy of quite another world!

"Don't take all that seriously I was telling you, Bob," he said, forcing a laugh. "I only met Toya Thiodolf last week; and I haven't any more to do with what she does than you have. I was only talking to see how much I could shock you; and you fell for it—ha, ha! You seemed to expect to be shocked in the big town, so I couldn't bear to disappoint you. Of course you're right. She'd have to give Leeminster up before she could be *my* girl. I never thought you'd swallow all *that*, honest! Oh you small-town kid!" By this time he had managed to make his laugh hearty. "So long. Call me up to say good-bye before you take the train South."

Branch gripped his hand as of old. "I'm willing to know I'm a mark to hear it isn't so about you," he said: "I'd never have got over your being *that* kind of a fellow, Arcy. It would have put me in a horrible hole if you ever came back to Greenborough and I had to invite you over to the house where my sisters are—and where the sweetest little girl in the world's going to be within the next year . . ."

V. THE NEST OF THE NIGHT BIRDS

NOEL'S, only a door from Curate's, owed its continued existence very largely to the fact of this proximity; for, although Arcy MacTea was yet to discover it, most of its patrons had reasons for being there somewhat similar to his own.

There is no Noel's in the Broadway of the new generation—a generation being but half a decade on Broadway. But then there existed a night life not dissimilar to that of Paris; of which Curate's represented the center, the Manhattan Café de Paris; Noel's, one of those Montmartre cabarets or bars where gather well-dressed Apaches, minor poets and actors. When this place had opened for the eleventh time under the eleventh name, Noel, who was risking all the savings he had gained as a captain of Curate's waiters, had gained permission to have a small door cut through into Curate's by which his waiters might come to fill those occasional orders for food which his patrons might give. These in the past history of the place had never been sufficient to defray the heavy cost of maintaining a kitchen: without the loss from which the place could easily be made to pay, as drink orders had always been numerous and were three-quarters profit, sometimes more.

But Noel had never imagined that this was the door to fortune. A modest profit on his investment was all he had hoped for. The existence of the door, however, by one of those curious paradoxes which give life its unfathomable aspect, soon made it impossible for Curate's to handle Noel's numerous food orders and provide promptly for its own customers; so he was forced to provide his own kitchen, after all. Forced? It was now the pleasure of his life; for it added another ten per cent. to his already doubled expectations.

But, although his waiters no longer needed the door, unless it was to procure some unusual brand of liquor or cigars,

it still remained in constant use. To close it, in fact, would have been to close Fortune out. One girl had learned of the door soon after Noel opened, and had used it to enter the place—bareheaded, uncloaked, ungloved, surprising everyone—to spend some precious minutes with the object of her affections, while the other man, smiling in the fatuous belief that he had made a conquest, was at that moment in Curate's, imagining she had gone to rearrange her hair or powder her nose. Within the week hundreds knew of the door: a knowledge they disseminated among their kind, carefully concealing it from any others. Thus, on following nights, Noel was covering serving tables with tablecloths and putting in extra and incongruous chairs.

That week Noel began the practice of locking his front door, admitting no one from the street farther than the cloak-room vestibule until he had lifted the curtain and scanned his would-be patron's face: a proceeding that enabled him to plead a lack of vacant tables to any whose presence would complicate affairs for those already within.

And so, as he seemed to be making a determined effort to keep the public out, it used all endeavors to crowd his place. To be admitted became somewhat of a *cachet*, a certificate of standing in Subterranea. He was careful to exclude, at least, all whose personal appearance did not indicate prosperity. Nor was this enough; sartorial splendor must be supplemented by adequate spending or one soon lost honor: Noel could pick and choose now, and he did.

Arcy found favor in his eyes on this, his first appearance, and of the crowd in the cloak-room that awaited Noel's pleasure was the first to be admitted. The ex-waiter-captain congratulated himself on his discernment when his new patron was immediately hailed by that ornamental fixture of his restaurant—Mr. Milton Lazard: deep in whose debt Noel was, for Lily Lamotte was among the first who had used the door

in the wall. Since then Lazard had herded in from other cafés many friends and associates. These had become Noel's steadfast patrons: entering around midnight, remaining until dawn; hence calling themselves "The Breakfast Club." For them, even on the busiest nights, the southeast corner was always reserved.

Arcy was insensible to the honor of Lazard's recognition, mentally anathematizing Toya for forcing him to identify himself in public with such a person. He approached, therefore, somewhat sulkily.

"Mr. Einstein, Mr. Brown, Mr. Carey, Mr. Satterlee, Mr. Cotterel—my friend, Arcy MacTea. As fine a lot of gentlemen as ever scuttled a ship, my boy. Just as harmless as a lot of baby rattlesnakes. You can trust them with anything you've got if it's nailed down. Take your hand out of the gentleman's watch pocket, Kid Einstein. Always ask a man for the time and see if he won't give it to you before you try to take it. That's what they call etiquette, you black-muzzled, cliff-dwelling kike. Although I know some men so mean they wouldn't let you set your clock by their watch: closer than the next second. Take out your glass eye, Carey, and do a trick for the gentleman. Hurry, hurry, hurry," he bellowed in the tone of a circus barker; "the show is now going on, on the inside. The Chandelier Brothers will jump from chandelier to chandelier—through the eye of a needle—without the aid of a net. On your left, the wild man is about to devour a raw Jew." He bent down as though addressing from a platform some passers-by below. "How did you like it, sir?" "Rotten," the invisible one was supposed to answer. Lazard raised his voice to the barker's bellow again: "You hear what the gentleman says—'Best show on the Island.' That's what they all say. Only a nickel—half a dime."

You are to imagine this monologue punctuated by bursts of wild laughter and the applause, not only of his companions

but of many parties at nearby tables. Lazard, conscious of his conspicuousness, made his voice reach as many as possible, succeeding sometimes in engaging the attention of all present; for it was an intimate room; narrow, low-roofed; its patrons crowded together on leather seats along the walls, the center cleared for dancing. But above the din and bustle Lazard's bellow rose whenever he considered he was about to voice some iconoclasm that would add to the reputation he coveted: that of "the man who owned Broadway," "the human night-key of New York," "the man who locks the town up"—such descriptions bestowed by reporters being coveted by semi-celebrities of the Nightless Lane.

Lazard had learned since their meeting that Arcy was a reporter: hence the altered attitude; and, despite his dislike, Arcy was amused. Quite a different person this from the scowling, snarling, unshaven satyr of the Shadenham. His smile was agreeable, his teeth evenly matched and of an extraordinary whiteness; his gestures and inflections were those of one with a genuine talent for clowning. Arcy laughed as loudly as any, and, refusing the proffered refreshment, insisted upon paying his initiation fee. To which Lazard objected loudly, tossing down a yellowback and challenging the waiter to dare receive any other: an openhandedness he took care should ever be overlooked; the impression going abroad that he was both liberal to a fault and annoyed by a surplus of wealth. Even his intimates were not allowed to imagine Lily Lamotte in any way responsible.

"A good little pal," he would assert patronizingly; "a good little pal. I know I can get half of everything she's ever got—only the poor little kid never has anything by the time she gets the bad news from the rent man. And say, I'd *stop* the bad news myself; but as soon as you start *giving* women anything you're *gone*. Go to 'em clean as a snowbird and they fall. But if *you* start handing shed and doughnut sugar,

they start handing it to some nice boy they'd like to see get along. Just mother instinct, I guess. Take care of *them* and they think they're cheated. But let 'em give *you* anything, no matter how petty larceny it is, and it makes 'em happy. They think they're supporting somebody. That's why it's all banked in my name. If I let her know she's drawing fifty a month more than she hands me, she'd blow me to-morrow. I even kid her I'm using some of it. . . ."

Which plausible explanation with a condescending loftiness of delivery belittled the insignificant Lily Lamotte and exalted her amiable consort. The reputation of being an object of the affections of one for the pleasure of whose presence others paid liberally was coveted by Lazard; but he resented bitterly its concomitant reputation—resented it because it gave rise to the inference that his own splendid talents were unable to provide plenteously.

Fearing that such an ill impression might have been made upon Arcy, Lazard now set earnestly to work to remove this and replace it with one of a gentleman adventurer, a soldier of fortune, a romantic figure spinning cobwebs of conspiracy, a hero of splendid hazards. Beads of perspiration stood out on his countenance, as he concentrated on comments and narratives at once humorous and thrilling—in which he was always the central figure.

* * * * *

It was to the possession of this narrative ability that Milton Lazard owed a laborless life. This accomplishment had early discovered for him his natural element: where young women passed the hat among the listeners; finding, after one or two physical mishaps, it was less hazardous to impose upon females. Equipped with a faithful companion, then, he followed her fortune through the mining camps of the West; until that section knew him too well. Followed one experience

with melted tar plus eiderdown, and an enforced ride astride the narrowest of seats; forcing him to seek the protection of the less barbarous East, accompanied by the prettiest (and youngest) of his many admirers.

His one talent, like his deformed body, was part of an atavism: his paternal ancestor some centuries removed having worn cap and bells in the service of a feudal Fleming, who, in the interest of mirth, had ordered that the illegitimate child of one of his serfs should be deliberately maimed in childhood that he might be forced to adopt the calling of jester and tale-teller: Sieur Huon shrewdly guessing that a love child, by so splendid a young animal as the serf girl, would inherit to the full the talents of his father—a wandering troubadour, *jongleur*, Rabelaisian-Villonesque poet.

Always there is some explanation for such monstrosities as Milton Lazard: the sins of "humanity" are visited upon the "civilization" that permits them. Hedged about by powerful lords and their ladies, the terrible pain that Sir Huon's wanton cruelty had caused to torture the unhappy jester must be crushed down, hidden from the sight of men. But the hate and malice it had engendered had been too strong to die unexpressed: at intervals the jester's family tree bore gallows fruit; even to the twelfth and twentieth generation. But it had not been until Milton Lazard that the exact portrait of the wretched *jongleur's* son, save for the humped back, was repainted: the huge head, the puny legs, undersized feet and hands. His nature was that same strange mixture of fear and hate, cowardice and cunning; he had the same ability to make jests when there were curses in his heart: he deferred to the strong and tortured the weak. All men and women were, to him, created for but one purpose: that they might be of advantage to him. And his ambition was to lead a life of laborless ease. To him, men who won success by work were not admirable but laughable.

It was a pernicious doctrine he preached; but it had the same doubtful merit of flashy wit that the quips and quirks of the jester had; who always chose sacred subjects for his highest flights. And there is that in men, especially young men, that fears protest lest it show a conventional viewpoint; they fear being conventional more than being wrong. Certain aspects of life are revealed to the clever youngster as other than what they have been taught; so that it is easier to assume that hypocrisy alone shields all other aspects than to discover the truth. Moreover, it is easier to be brilliant at blaming than at praising.

Arcy MacTea being at this earlier stage of mental development, it was not long before Lazard had removed his dislike: even, as the drinks circulated, caused him to be so eager for the praise of a high priest of the super-knock that he ventured into those realms of conversation forbidden to the discreet. . . .

VI. HAWKS AT HOME

"WHAT were you doing, sitting there and laughing with that Milton Lazard?" demanded little Miss Toya sharply. "Do you want people to talk about us the way they talk about him and Lily? And after what *you* said to *me*! And there's three girls from our show in Noel's. To-morrow they'll have it all over the theater!"

"That's rich," returned Arcy, somewhat unsteadily—the night air had not yet blown away the fumes of many Scotches. "You telling everybody you do what I tell you to do and what a smart fellow you've got, and then blaming *me* if you get a bad reputation: I've warned you hundreds of times. And who *asked* me to wait in Noel's? What kind of people did you *expect* me to meet there? Would I have known Lazard *at all* if you hadn't introduced us?"

Toya had no answer for so many arguments. If she had been sufficiently gifted to voice her subconscious thought, her reply would have been that his business was to rectify a flighty, inexperienced girl's mistakes, not to add to them.

Unless one counts those girls unfortunate enough to be infatuated with him—in which cases he had always taken care to select grossly ignorant or brainless ones—Lazard had less success in convincing women than men. Women, if they are not blinded by passion or vanity, seldom err in detecting baseness of character; seldom fail to be aware of the hall-mark even if they do not appreciate it. It is only that their sense of logic, being a scant half-century old, has not been sufficiently developed to give synthetic reasons for results; and this is to their benefit rather than to their hurt; for one cunning of argument may twist to his will the thoughts of those who put their faith in it; while a woman, whom the subtlest philosophy influences not at all—in personal matters at least—is not turned by it from her original impressions and purposes. So—

"I don't like that Milton Lazard. He's no good. Please don't be seen out with him, Arcy." Finding her anger unavailing, she had descended to a more dependable weapon. "You know he doesn't like *you*. He's jealous of you: he hates everybody who's smarter than he is. If *he's* so bright, why's Lily doing *what* she's doing? Terrible: an awful-nice girl like that—if you get her by herself. But he has such a bad influence on her. I wish he'd go and marry that rich old woman, Mrs. Lang. Lily would get along all right then—"

"Lazard hasn't got anything to do with what Lily is," returned Arcy irritably. "He's a fool, smart fellow as he is, to stick around with that kind of a girl. What was she when he met her? Just the same. Wasn't even bluffing at the stage . . ."

"Lily didn't *tell* me she supports him," defended Toya

indignantly: "I just *know*. *She's* always saying he makes his own money, too. But I'm surprised at *you*, Arcy; supposed to be smart and everything . . ."

"It's a good thing I've got a regular job and people see me working every day," returned Arcy, "or I suppose they'd be saying the same about me. I tell you, Lazard's made all kinds of money. He don't care about her. He's only sorry for her, afraid she'll commit suicide or something if he breaks away. *He* can't change her any. *She's* got no *ambition*. *She* don't *want* to study like *you* do. . . ."

Toya shrugged her shoulders. She ceased to argue, for Arcy had taught her that what she considered argument failed to convince anyone; but her vision of Lazard was unalterable. "Well—you'll see," she could not forbear adding, however, as they entered Arcy's rooms.

Arcy had a studio apartment overlooking the rector's garden of an Episcopal church which, save for the ivy-covered brick wall which hid the sidewalk, gave him an uninterrupted view of lower Fifth Avenue. Here it was like London. The houses had that beauty architecture alone cannot give—age must assist. There were polished brass knockers on white paneled, mahogany or rosewood doors; pilasters that had the grace of ancient Doric columns, spiral handrails of green bronze or of brass, ornamenting short flights of long, thin marble doorsteps. In the basements below, in the drawing-rooms above, were window boxes of brightly colored flowers or of creeping plants; on either side of doorways closely clipped dwarf evergreens in miniature tubs, or else, where there were wooden doorsteps, more oblong boxes of flowers. More than one house was set amid rosetrees, hydrangeas, chrysanthemums and other hardy growths. Only the rector's garden was walled: this, which Arcy's windows overlooked, was a long, pleasant lawn, a fountain in its center bordered with flowers, in the pool of which swam gold and silver fishes.

Here the nurses of a *crèche*, where workingwomen left their children for the day, were allowed to bring their small charges to roll amid garlic and buttercups and clover—for it was like a piece of meadow brought intact on a magic carpet. Robins and swallows, in spring, nested in the ivy or under the quaint chimney pots of the old rectory; and these, no doubt, had brought the pollen of those growths of the open country. Occasionally catbirds came, blue jays, too, and in an old hollow tree a swarm of bees had recently installed a queen.

For these sights and sounds Arcy had been willing to disburse almost half his weekly wage: and before meeting Toya, had spent much time seated at the large bay window, watching and listening, pen in hand, to record the inspiration of the moment: Arcy's ambition had been the production of historical novels; and in this Old World corner, staring at stained-glass-windows to the accompaniment of the mellow pipe organ rolling forth Gregorian chants, his blood had been stirred by the exploits of his dead and gone heroes, and finding the inspiration he sought, he had written steadily and well.

Toya's advent had changed all that. He had not added a chapter to his novel since their mating. Yet still his surroundings served a purpose. Coming down here away from the tawdriness of Longacre, she had been impressed and had begun to realize there might be reasons after all why he would not readily marry her; even though his infatuation had swept away most of his resolutions. And she, being wise beyond her years, had ceased to speak daily of marriage; finding a safer road to its achievement by adopting new tactics.

"It isn't as if you'd taken up with one of those big cats," she had purred; "it's only a little kitten, and her papa can teach her anything he wants her to know, can't he?" Here she nestled closer to him. "And he can make her an educated kitten that he'll be proud of, too. 'Cause it's a smart little kitten—it's a smart little kitten," she crowed. "Isn't it, papa?"

Which, were chroniclers honest, is a saner speech than most endearing ones exchanged between infatuated young couples. And it had delighted Arcy. "That is a smart kitten," he approved; "and her papa will see it gets its little education." Neither seemed greatly in earnest, but neither had ever been more so. On the following day, Arcy had laid out a course of reading for her, and had taken her to a retired governess who was to superintend, and assist in, her study. Singing lessons had followed. The reformation in clothes had come before that. All of which had so impressed the great Bob Ledyard that, when he had put on "The Bonbon Girl," he had promoted little Miss Thiodolf to a small part. And where J. Tubman Leeminster had once pursued perfunctorily, an amateur collector after a pretty butterfly, he was now as grimly determined as an enthusiastic naturalist chasing the rarest of Venus moths.

It was on the subject of Leeminster (his favorite grievance) that Arcy spoke when they sat before the small studio fire that the early autumn chill had rendered necessary. "Here we could have been home long ago," he said gloomily. "How am I ever going to get my novel done if I have to wait for you three nights a week before I eat my supper?"

"But you used to say you didn't enjoy it unless I was there," she reproached: "you don't care for me like you did at first. That's what I get for giving myself to you. You're beginning to get tired of me. If I'd held you off the way I've done with all the others—"

"O-oh," returned an irritated Arcy, "it's because I *do* care. It just makes me wild to think a fellow like that has the power to 'command your presence' just like a king. . . ."

"But think of what the jewelry alone is worth, darling dear," the girl pleaded, slipping down to the hearth rug and resting her head on his knee. "Suppose I'm out of a job. Or you are. Or if either of us is sick—or anything; we'd have these. And he's going to give me a big cabochon ruby some

time this month. I know his little game. He's getting ready to tell me he's got to marry that Hefflefinger girl. How did you find out about her, Arcy? You never told me."

"It wasn't printed because old man Hefflefinger owns stock in one of the big newspaper syndicates; and he doesn't want the engagement announced until everything's settled. Those big newspaper-owners swap favors, suppressing news if it isn't *too* big. The lawyers are fighting it out. Leeminster's attorneys want too much: the marriage settlement, you know. Leeminster won't take any chances with papa-in-law's generosity. He knows the viewpoint of the plain people about a husband who lives on his wife. He's seen too many things happen to other men in his set. The purse strings make the monkey jump: if the wife holds 'em, he must jump her way. Can't get anything to spend unless he explains what it's for. And where would he have the money to buy you cabochon rubies then? He's only getting it now—at loan-shark interest—on the strength of his coming marriage."

"He was telling me that to-night," said Toya indignantly. "He thought he was being *very* smart—said there was a rich girl who *wanted* to marry him, and he was letting people think he was going to, because the money-lenders would let him have lots of money that way. I wasn't to let on he was going to marry *me*. That would ruin everything."

"You bet it would," agreed Arcy: "the girl, of course, is going into this with her eyes open: money for social position. But she's making her old-fashioned father think she really loves Leeminster, and that he loves her. Only his people won't recognize the match and call on her unless Leeminster's put on his feet and made independent. The old man swallowed that, somehow—so the society woman who gives our society reporter his inside stuff says—another broke aristocrat. But if Pop Hefflefinger ever found out Leeminster didn't care for his daughter, didn't intend to be any more of a husband to her

than he could help—Lord! Pop's after a grandson and heir, and if he thought he would get one only so that the kid's parents could lay hands on the rest of his fortune, the thing 'ud be o-double-f, *off*. . . . Why, what's the matter, Kit-tens?"—for Toya had begun with a ripple, ending with a spasm of laughter.

"Suppose he saw the letters Tubby wrote me," she finally elucidated. Arcy nodded. No glimmering of what he was to do as yet lit up the matter of those letters.

"Well, I should say so," he agreed. "I was just thinking something like that to-night while I was waiting for you. About twelve girls in evening clothes without any wraps or anything came in and sat down with some fellow for a while and then went off again. Lazard explained to me about the door in the wall: told me who the girls were. I got to thinking. The men those girls had left in Curate's all had big fortunes. Not one could afford to get his name in the papers with that of a chorus girl. Yet, when one throws a girl down—as they always do—if the girl tries to get anything they call it black-mail, and then lawyers scare her so she shuts up and forgets it—"

"Serves her right for giving in to a man she doesn't love," yawned Toya, uninterested in the affairs of her own sex. "You'd have done the same if you hadn't met me," accused Arcy. She denied this indignantly; and the colloquy veered to more personal grounds, became a minor quarrel. Which ended as such affairs generally do in interchanges of endearments quite too silly for a place on a printed page—even in a day of fiction less mentally nourishing than the confectionery it endeavors to imitate.

VIII. BLACKGUARDS AND BLACKMAIL

ARCY found himself wakeful that night, so in that enchanted realm just preceding slumber, where imagination becomes reality, saw himself addressing the young men to visit whom those twelve girls had come through the door in the wall. He did not fancy their lack of character in permitting the girls to worship both Eros and Mammon; but his own complaisance in the matter of Toya's suppers with Leeminster led him to make excuses for them. He saw himself urging them to advise the girls to save tangible evidence in the shape of letters, telegrams, canceled cheques and so forth and with them regain their independence; arranging the matter through a lawyer's hands in a perfectly legal way. It was then that there occurred to him the significance of Leeminster's letters to Toya: letters written during the "try-out" of "The Bonbon Girl," to various outland theaters. They had already served one purpose: reading them had convinced Arcy of the absolute innocence of Toya's relationship, for Leeminster wrote as respectfully as to a girl of his own class.

Arcy, who possessed an uncommon memory, now visualized one or two. They were the sort of letters any girl would be proud to receive from a fiancé. . . . Arcy chuckled hugely. Toya could have what he coveted for her: a finishing course at the Paris conservatory, emerging therefrom polished, accomplished, possessed of *savoir faire*, fit to adorn the stage of any country. With her beauty she need never return to America unless she chose.

It was all he could do to keep from awakening the girl and acquainting her with her good fortune. But, he reflected, it was as well to be silent even to her: she would find it difficult to avoid crowing over her triumph, surrounded each night by envious, or admiring, acquaintances, ten girls in her dressing-

room alone. No, it would wait until the announcement of Miss Hefflefinger's engagement to Mr. J. Tubman Leeminster. Then the bombshell, before Leeminster could play his hand—which Arcy imagined would be to tell Toya he was marrying "Mae" only to gain the huge settlement; after which he would behave so badly she would be forced to divorce him—"and—then—sweetheart . . ." Meanwhile, although a cruel fate withheld his name from her for a brief space, were they not truly one in divine sight? . . . Not original, truly, but it has convinced millions, will convince millions more, is convincing thousands at this moment. To Leeminster it meant the capture of the quarry or giving up the chase.

Early on the following day Arcy visited Toya's apartment, took Leeminster's letters from their all-too-evident hiding place, and in her name hired a safe-deposit vault for their safe-keeping. Toya, at her singing lesson, knew nothing of it; nor did he inform her: even went so far as not to mention again to her the possibilities the girls who used the door in the wall were overlooking. But, finding this topic ensured attention at Noel's, he spoke upon it many times for the edification of Lazard and others of the patrons: his visits to their rendezvous being another explanation not vouchsafed Toya. Her dislike for Lazard permitted no common-sense view of their acquaintance. Now and again, Arcy had an uneasy sentience as to the superiority of her intuition over his logic—in this matter at least.

But it was not difficult to understand the attraction Lazard had for such as Arcy. There were many others not of Subterranea to be found in his company: besides the reporters for theatrical journals, several actors, a poet, a writer of popular songs.

In none did he inspire that friendship which is the wonder of women. None were solicitous of his welfare, none would have placed their purse at his disposal in misfortune. They

sought Noel's as audiences seek out that theater advertised as having the most amusing play. Lazard worked hard for their laughter; like the comedian over the way who was paid his weight in gold yearly, he came to his evening's performance rehearsed and ready.

To the craftsman in humor, who must grind out laughs by the yard, Lazard's method would have been apparent. His was not spontaneous humor: he worked by formula, was amusing only on certain subjects. A detective couldn't catch a cold: couldn't find the third rail in the Subway: couldn't locate a Saratoga trunk in a hall bedroom, and so on, *ad infinitum*, regarding the stupidity of detectives, a mere reversal of the average belief in their astuteness. As for thieves, another class popularly supposed to be clever, a thief couldn't steal a bunch of grass from Central Park, or a handful of water out of the East River without getting an icicle down his back; or a swindler couldn't get a biscuit for a barrel of flour. Philanthropists wouldn't give the Lord a prayer; were closer than the next second. A woman who aimed at society—he was referring to Mrs. Carolus Lang at the time—"couldn't get into the Hay-market"—a disorderly resort—"with a letter from the pope." . . . The latter phrase yields a second key to his method: an irreverence that stopped at nothing. There were no sacred things to Milton Lazard. Once, when in straits more desperate than usual, he had deemed it a rare jest to send to his old mother a telegram announcing his own demise, asking for funds to save the body from the Potter's Field, signing the name of a friend who received the money and who shared in the spoils—the mother, on an annuity, having hitherto refused to pauperize herself further after yielding for years to his demands. He told this story as a *chef d'œuvre*. But it was not until after Lazard's betrayal of him that Arcy subjected his wit to analysis, discovering its mechanics. For the few weeks of their acquaintance, he hardened his heart to any inner

whisperings that hinted the acquaintance was a mistake. And Lazard played his fish like the veteran angler he was. Such tales as his imposition upon his mother were reserved for other ears. He knew Arcy's limitations—as he would have described them—and stayed within them; for he was anxious that the reporter should be his friend.

Lazard was, even then, contemplating marriage with Mrs. Carolus Lang: the doctors' reports from the Cannes château tending toward the belief that the veteran financier would not live out the year. But before Lazard could be married again, he needed money that he might divorce the concert-hall singer he had married away back in the days of his youth: had married because she was just then the rage of mining camps and earned a large salary, and because she would not yield it to him in any other way. But she had soon been supplanted by a younger and better-looking woman. Now she was singing in the moving-picture houses, and needed money herself. She had written, in answer to his question, that she would divorce him if he paid the expenses and gave her a thousand dollars. He had not yet the courage to approach Mrs. Lang for a loan. After succeeding in impressing her that he loved her unselfishly, he was not yet sure enough of her to dare arouse possible suspicions that he was mercenary. And Lily's earnings only sufficed for expenses.

It was in Arcy that he saw his salvation: the new jewelry Toya was displaying seemed to Lazard but the natural concomitant of cash she must be receiving. He judged Arcy by his own standards and could not believe that he would fail to profit by his wealthy rival's infatuation. Himself, he would soon have driven Leeminster away by his greediness. "Never mind the junk," he would have advised her; "say you need money to pay the mortgage on the old home—he'll fall for anything." Which was the reason Lily Lamotte kept her admirers so short a time.

Lazard had not the foresight—even in his unpleasant occupation—to play the waiting game. Like most potential criminals, he was too eager for immediate rewards.

His resolution to ask Arcy for half of the necessary money for his divorce—he had some of his own, laid by without Lily's knowledge—was hastened by the events immediately following the announcement of Leeminster's engagement. For, on that same day, Toya's lawyers approached Leeminster's with photographs of the letters, the announcement of a breach-of-promise suit to be instituted, and an inquiry as to whether their client wanted to compromise. Leeminster had made frantic efforts to reach Toya for days preceding this announcement; but Arcy had deemed it wise that she should plead sickness, absenting herself from the company and retiring to Atlantic City—so that Leeminster might imagine the suit was brought because of imagined unfaithfulness. Whereas, if she would only give him "a chance to explain . . ."

As he failed to locate her, either before or after the announcement, and her lawyers were obdurate: either he must compromise within two days or the suit would be filed—he compromised. Knowing old Hefflefinger's distaste for the engagement, anyway, the absolute certainty of his fierce denunciation and the severance of all connections, once those letters were published, he had recourse to the twenty-per-cent. men again and paid over one-tenth of the hundred thousand demanded.

Needless to relate, these latter developments were not recorded in the public press; and all might have gone well had Toya been able to restrain the delight of her realized ambitions. But she was, as has been stated, in the company of many other girls each evening: ten dressing-room mates, all of whom she considered her dearest friends. They knew, of course, that she was giving her two weeks' notice, was departing for Paris; and as they pestered her with questions as to her financial

fairy, presently under the seal of confidence—she being wild with desire to confide in somebody, anyhow—she told several. And Lily Lamotte carried a bitter wail to Milton Lazard.

“ . . . Always telling how smart *you* are, and what have you ever done for *me*? And running that Arcy down. And look what he’s done for *her*. And he hasn’t made her cheap and common doing it, either, although you say they’re both liars. Well, if they are, nobody knows it. She can hold her head up. And she’ll come back and be a star after studying in Paris, and what’ll I be? A tramp just like I am now. Oh, I wish I’d listened to her. Everybody always said I was out of my class being with you—”

“You bet you were,” he returned savagely. “But you used a step-ladder, not a diving-bell. You were so close to the ground when I met you, you couldn’t kick a duck in the stomach.” He had caught up his hat and coat and now slammed the door behind him, divided between elation and resentment: overjoyed that Arcy should have no excuse now for refusing his request, hating the reporter bitterly for having succeeded where he had failed—he the infinitely superior man. He had lost caste in the eyes of the girl who worshiped him: a state of affairs that might terminate in his losing Lily before she ceased to be necessary.

But his egotism did not permit him to admit even the possibility of Arcy’s superiority. He laid it to a pestilential luck, growling viciously at the man who was to benefit him: “a half-wit if ever there was one,” he told himself, remembering Arcy’s “narrow-mindedness” which compelled him to delete some most delectable details from his favorite stories. “Just a lucky little sucker,” he added, and regained the stature lost by Lily’s harangue.

He was again the patronizing critic of the universe when he entered Noel’s. Arcy was not there. It was past theater time and, since Leeminster had been eliminated, he came only

while waiting for Toya to finish her performance, over an hour before. Lazard repaired to other and more seemly restaurants; but the pair were to be found in none of them. And then he committed a grave error of judgment: he should have remembered Toya's intense dislike for him, should have realized Arcy would not advertise his acquaintance with him, Lazard, lest she hear of it. But now that the money seemed so near, he could not wait: he plunged on downtown and rang Arcy's door-bell. The door was opened by Toya, who, with the sleeves of her shirt-waist uprolled, was assisting in packing. She viewed Arcy with disapproval when he welcomed his visitor.

"We're sailing day after to-morrow," he added. "*The Chartic*. Excuse me if I go on working, will you? Have a drink and a cigarette, or a cigar — they're all in that little cellaret over there." Toya had not greeted him; nor did she. Lazard began to realize he had chosen an inauspicious time and place. "Didn't know you were busy, old pal," he said, taking up his hat again. "Meet me to-morrow and have lunch, will you?" But a glance at Toya's mutinous face told him he had again erred and that, as she was free at that hour, she would make it too uncomfortable for Arcy to keep the engagement. Therefore—

"I'd like to speak to you a moment now—in private," he said. Strangely enough, Toya seemed to disregard this entirely: even when Arcy excused himself she did not turn. He led Lazard into the bedroom and closed the door. Simulating stress and suppressed excitement, Lazard told a story of dire need: a loan that was being called on a piece of property worth ten times the mortgage value—he would give him a duly certified mortgage on it to-morrow. Meanwhile his post-dated cheque would guarantee Arcy against loss.

There is no doubt that Arcy would have refused; but he would have found excuses for doing so: money tied up just then, would arrange it next day—thereafter avoiding Lazard

until sailing day—such moral cowards are men. But he was saved the lie. Toya had thrown open the door, her gesture dramatic. "I'd like to see you lend any money to that poor thing!" she said; then in a fulmination of scorn: "I thought you were up to some tricks so I listened. What do you take us for, Milton Lazard? Think everybody's a softy like poor Lily? I'd rather throw it in the river than lend it to you. You're so *smart*, why don't you get some of your own? *Smart!!* Yes, to silly Lilys who don't know anything!"

Black hate bubbled in Lazard's mouth; his eyes burned. "I guess if that Leeminster knew what you doped up on him, it might cost you more'n I asked for," he said thickly. "They call that blackmail." At which Arcy, hitherto annoyed with Toya, shifted sides.

"So that's the kind of a big rat you are, eh?" he asked. "That closes your act with me." As Lazard clenched his fists, MacTea caught up the firetongs. In these strained positions they remained a moment: until Lazard, with an ugly laugh—for he had thought of something from which firetongs were no protection—turned and strode rapidly from the room.

The waiting taxicab, the cost of which would have been but a drop in the ocean of what he had expected to bear away, now irritated him beyond measure; so, observing that the chauffeur dozed on his seat, Lazard, closing the house door noiselessly, hurried away. The same malice that had caused the misshapen jester to visit poisoners for potions of red toadstool, which, dropped into the drink of the men-at-arms, would punish them with cruel griping pains for their sport at his expense, now seethed in his descendant. That Slavonic servant girl to insult *him*! That poor little lucky sucker to call *him* a rat!! Why hadn't he beaten their heads in—he could have wrested those tongs away easily! Not willing to admit to cowardice, he told himself it was because he had a better way to pay his score. He grinned, he sneered, he went into ecstasies

of gloating . . . and, long past midnight, after visiting three clubs, he found Mr. J. Tubman Leeminster; who received him with almost as distant an air (Lazard's exaggerated clothes betrayed him) as had the club porter. Which, threatening Lazard's self-estimation as it did, almost ruined his object by sending rudeness to his tongue tip. He controlled himself, however, and spoke without emotion. . . . If someone had deliberately tricked Mr. Leeminster, had repaid his favors with ingratitude, entering into a most iniquitous plot against him . . . was it worth Mr. Leeminster's while to know? He referred to Miss Thiodolf—to cut short a long story. Leeminster darkened. What did he mean?

"She never had any intention of marrying you. She was in love with another fellow. She only wanted what you could give her; was going to throw you over anyway? If you could prove this, could you get back that blackmail money?"

"Blackmail?" thundered Leeminster.

"What else?" asked Lazard.

A moment of silence: then, unable any longer to command the venom that his brain was spewing into his mouth, Lazard became vicious. "She had a fellow long before she ever met you. She didn't aim so high as you before. Any kind of a man would do." So full of hate was he, he had to shut his lips tightly lest he betray himself. It is not certain he did not believe he was speaking truth. Were that heavy-headed guy and that heavy-footed girl superior to him and his? Getting himself into better control, he piled up disgraceful details for Leeminster to hear: realistic and convincing details culled from ugly personal experience. And then added stories read in sensational newspapers: a drugged drink, a promise of marriage, a horrible awakening . . .

He had seen how solemnly the public believed such tales: how effective they were in arousing editorial indignation. Himself, he had not found it worth while to angle for innocent

girls: poverty had already done the work drugs and promises of marriage were supposed to do; but poverty did not make melodramatic reading, and it shifted the blame onto the shoulders of those upright ones bent on suppressing "the traffic." Women who plead poverty for an excuse did not get the sympathy, attention, widespread publicity of those who sobbed of lurid lures. Lazard knew many girls who had discovered that the easiest way to escape legal penalties was to disclose harrowing details of organized "cadet" bands of which they were victims. He, even more unscrupulous, had no hesitation in adding anything that would put Leeminster in a rage, that would ensure extreme measures.

"A white slave?" gasped that young gentleman; whose taxicab accounts and jewelry had made a few—as the phrase has come to be used. But he had done so quite legitimately—for his royal pleasure: and he was not for a moment to be confused with those abandoned wretches who did it for a livelihood.

Lazard was overjoyed. "A white slave," he confirmed, rejoicing at his acumen in adding the effectual melodrama. "A white slave, that's what." He was possessed of his ancestor's crafty coward's intuition: had seen Leeminster would not be receptive to any evil tales of Toya: therefore Arcy should suffer for both. "And that's the fellow who'll be spending your money in Europe in a week or so!"

Leeminster started up, kicked over an ottoman, stamped noisily about the private card-room. Exhausting his vocabulary, he sputtered: in wild wrath, he banged his fist on a little green-topped table which, being collapsible, collapsed. To hear him one would have imagined he had given Toya the purest, most unselfish devotion. If, almost, he deceived Lazard, certainly he deceived himself. He was Sir Galahad the Spotless, rescuer of maidens from monsters, Perseus arming himself to save an Andromeda and slay a dragon. One might have

believed he was superior to wounded vanity, hurt pride, the loss of money, the desire for revenge. For the moment, it seemed Miss Hefflefinger's fortune might go hang: mattered only the rescuing of "that poor little girl." . . .

Lazard knew when the first fury had spent itself Leeminster would return to sanity; realizing on the way that no steps could be taken which would jeopardize the announced alliance. Which would forbid any prosecution for blackmail, even for obtaining money under false pretenses. The blacker the girl's character the less able he would be to explain satisfactorily those letters. This became apparent to Leeminster after a moment of calm consideration. Then as violently as before, "I'll half murder that blackguard," he breathed heavily. "Where can I find him? Wait till I go home and get a horse-whip. Then you just point him out to me. *I'll settle him.*"

But Lazard, having won, was suave. "And get your name in the papers and have the whole story come out? Let the law settle him. Oh, I know"—this to Leeminster's impatient wave of the hand—"I know. Not by any lawsuit or prosecution. Isn't this fellow a danger to the community? And haven't I seen you around a lot with the District Attorney?" He paused, seeing he had Leeminster's attention. "Now's where *I* come in—I don't pretend to be doing all this for nothing: you wouldn't believe me, anyway. I need a thousand. If I show you how to put MacThyndall away for two years without mixing your name in it at all, you'd *give* me a thousand, wouldn't you?"

For a moment Leeminster did not answer: sat sneering, staring with fishy eyes. "I suppose you're another one just like him. You've been friends and he did something to you—eh?" Lazard, crushing down a desire to close those cold, superior eyes, rose and, having studied human nature over the poker table, and knowing the value of bluff, made for the door. Leeminster stopped him. "I don't suppose it matters *why*,"

he grumbled grudgingly. "Set a thief to catch a thief. All right. If he goes away you get your thousand. You'll have to take my word," he added, anticipating correctly the request on Lazard's lips: a bitter blow to the parasite, unprovided for this, having been too occupied with his hatred to think of it: imagining the money paid down that night.

But his brain was quick enough in such matters. "If you don't pay me, I'll let MacThyndall know the whole business anonymously, and, as I won't figure in it, you'll get into trouble," he said insolently.

"I didn't expect one of your stripe to understand a gentleman may do anything but break his word—even to a black-guard," was Leeminster's contemptuous retort. "Go ahead."

"Well, then," said Lazard, after a sulky pause, "there's a door between Curate's and Noel's. While you fellows are in Curate's with these girls, they make some excuse and slip into Noel's to tell the fellows there when they can get rid of you."

He enjoyed seeing Leeminster wince, regained some of his enthusiasm. "She's not the only one. There's fifty or sixty girls do that. This MacThyndall's been talking to them, telling them to go off somewhere and get you fellows to send 'em telegrams and letters so's they'd have something to hold you up with when you try to throw them down. That's wholesale blackmail, ain't it? If the District Attorney lets *him* get away with this, there'll be ten cases like yours a month. You fellows won't dare to have Broadway girls at all. And the D. A.'s one of your bunch. Well, do you know how the D. A. or the chief handles a dangerous guy that they can't get anything *on*? They 'frame' him, drop a gun in his pocket: then they have some strong-arm guy pick a fight with him, and plant the gat while they're fighting, lose the other fellow and arrest the one that's framed for. When he's searched before they lock him up, they find the cannon. Pretty neat, eh? I'd like to have a dollar for every fellow they've put away like that."

Forgetting his grievance, Leeminster clenched his fist, almost lashed out with it at the malicious, self-satisfied, grinning face. Remembering, he transferred his hatred to the one who had mulcted him. "Will you tell Mr. Knipe what you told me?" he asked sourly. "About that door between Curate's and Noel's and how this fellow's been advising you and your fine friends to wholesale blackmail?"

"If my name's kept out of it, you bet I will," was Lazard's savage response. "I'd like to see that guy's face when they find the gun."

"Come on then," said Leeminster. "We'll catch him if we hurry." He did not find it necessary to state that the official sought played poker at the River Club until a very late hour. Nor did he wait for the porter to summon a taxicab and receive his legitimate commission both ways. Which gave rise to grave doubts in the mind of that functionary whether or not Mr. Leeminster was really a gentleman.

VIII. THE HAWK BECOMES A HUMMING-BIRD

WERE this tale told in the year of the events recorded, widespread indignation would greet the statement that, as Lazard conjectured, so did it come to pass. But much calcium light has flooded the dark places of punitive departments since the days when the center of the theatrical belt was presided over by the Bennett owls and the statue of Horace Greeley, since hansoms waited at stage doors and their occupants might make merry until dawn. Exposure has followed exposure. To discover what sort were they who could go about the business of assassination in motor cars, the searchlight has soared beyond the clay feet of Manhattan and found its face of brass. Other than one who protects the shame of high places now rules in

the office of District Attorney: his hand has helped turn upward the searchlight. But the man who played late at the River Club had personal reasons for wishing to see the sport of kings protected. It was enough that there were rude rascals who poached upon the preserves of gentlemen; but when one bade them stand and deliver besides, an example must be made that would strike terror into his like.

It had been largely through this gentleman's activities that the statute legalizing common-law marriages—that is, when a woman had lived a certain number of years with a man she was entitled to the name and privileges of a wife—had been repealed, to save from annoying *mésalliances* many sons of the rich who had mistresses. Now, when he heard of the activities of Arcy MacTea, he voiced a belief that, should this man go unpunished, here was a danger quite as great: gentlemen soon would be unable to bait traps with luxury and cease supplying bait, at their pleasure. It was impossible not to do or say something compromising even if one wrote no letters. Which, like that dastardly common-law marriage statute, was a direct blow at the liberty the common people had fought to give men of birth and fortune. Were prerogatives gained in a Revolution to be endangered? He guessed not!

But he also did not guess at the fact that he was to bring about his ears a nest of hornets which up to now had been disguised as honey-giving bees. The newspapers had hitherto supported him under the impression that one of independent fortune would be more honest than a professional politician. But, when Arcy, imprisoned at police headquarters, had sworn many oaths as to the outrage perpetrated upon him and had convinced the star reporter of his paper he had been victimized to please somebody—prudently antedating Toya's breach of promise, Jim North had flown to his city editor. The indignant two had sought the managing editor, the militant three had found the owner, and the furious four had called upon the

judge who was to set Arcy's bail on the following morning. It happened to be a judge who was well aware of the Bluebeard chamber in the District Attorney's edifice of apparent rectitude, and, as that person had once declined—seeing no gain—to soften the prosecution of a friend of the judge's friend's friend, that dignitary now saw the chance of having that chamber unlocked. But they were of the same party, and even if the unlocking were done by him, he must still keep the secret for the party's sake. So, instead of assuring the furious four that the evidence against Arcy would be found insufficient to hold him, he suggested that, if he held him on small bail, Mr. MacThyndall could take his trip to Europe and help represent his paper in Paris, as had been arranged—"skipping" his bail if necessary; while the newspaper's lawyers investigated his case and found the Bluebeard chamber. Which suited the irate newspaper owner well enough; this same District Attorney had not shown sufficient gratitude for the journalistic assistance that had elected him.

Thus it was, to the extreme indignation of the District Attorney—for his assistant detailed on the case had done all possible to impress the judge that now was the time to show the lawless that the new law about weapons was going to be enforced—Arcy was freed at so small an expense to his bondsman that one would have supposed the new law was not yet in force. But when he heard who the bondsman was, and that Robert C. MacThyndall was the R. C. MacT. whose initials met his eye each morning at the breakfast table—true, Arcy had given his occupation as "newspaper man," but that was a favorite evasion of the sons of Subterranea—the District Attorney's wrath against Mr. J. Tubman Leeminster was terrible to behold; that gentleman, hastily summoned, having arrived, he was restrained from doing him an injury only by the fact that Leeminster was the larger of the two.

"A fine trick you've played on me," he whispered shrilly,

in the accents of a scream. "Why didn't you tell me that fellow was a reporter? You let me think he was a grafter—"

"So he was," said Leeminster: "I don't care if he was a reporter or not. . . ."

"*You* don't care?" bellowed the District Attorney. "Why, I'd sooner arrest a Fourteenth Street politician than a reporter on the *Argus*. Scarthwaite'll never let up on me now; and when he starts for anybody, they're gone. He just hounds you and hounds you and hounds you. I've got to live like a Trappist monk or get out. You've ruined me, Tubby Leeminster."

So it proved. A year later there was a new District Attorney: Leeminster's friend was not even nominated.

* * * * *

That year was spent both profitably and pleasantly by Mr. and Mrs. R. C. MacThyndall—married since Arcy, by the great luck of Toya knowing the girl from a former show, got the full details of her suicide, which involved the heir of one of America's large fortunes. His wife had long known of his *liaison*, but had permitted it because she was freer married than divorced. But the man had left the former show-girl to follow another woman of fashion, and, this being one of the few cases where the girl really cared for the man, not the money, Toya's friend took poison. But, before doing so, she had seen Toya in Paris and had told of this intention should Arthur refuse to return from St. Moritz to their London apartment; and, when the news of her death came, Arcy gave his chief a story to cable that with its developments held the front pages of the New York newspapers for a week or more; forcing the wife to institute divorce proceedings, the co-respondent the woman for whom Arthur deserted Toya's friend. All of which belongs to another history which shall some day be related.

Arcy had learned sufficient of the world not to tell of the

lucky chance which had given him the details in a lace napkin. He invented, instead, a series of imaginary sleuthings which redounded to his resourcefulness; and the Paris correspondent had urged earnestly that Mr. Scarthwaite increase Arcy's honorarium. Which was not needed when the proprietor of the *Argus* heard it was the younger man who had given the paper the "exclusive" which had made all the other Manhattan dailies hold their injured noses.

Then it was that Arcy had yielded to the oft repeated request of Toya that their union be legitimatized. He had held off, hitherto, for a reason that, strangely enough, was an unselfish one. When first he had met Toya, she was the usual loud-voiced, ignorant chorus girl, considering herself, with neither birth, breeding nor any save a rudimentary education, the equal of all, the superior of most; brought to this pert and egotistical belief by a false system of public-school training, plus the attention and compliments every pretty, youthful girl receives from stage-door hangers-on. Meeting men with famous names and finding them bores or beasts, it is not strange such girls should fail to believe in a superior class.

Arcy had changed all that: since she loved him, she feared him and respected his attainments; was desirous of awakening in him more than the cool, kind affection which was all he gave her—openly. She had set herself to win his admiration, to make herself all he seemed to think a woman should be. Otherwise, she would have dropped Leeminster immediately; but she needed money for her music, her education generally. Moreover, she wished to dress as did those Fifth Avenue women whose *chic*, until then, she had not found so evident as that of her sister show-girls; and to save, after the thrifty Slavonic fashion, for summers of no work and many rehearsals. Then, gradually, through his constant mockery of her favorite fiction, she developed a taste for good literature; which, abetted by professional matinées at the better-class theaters where she saw

English comedies acted by actors familiar with the usages of drawing-rooms, gave her knowledge of a class apart from the noisy spectacular brass-band set whose escapades and scandal fill the Sunday supplements; a class impossible to respect and easy to emulate in dress and manners, which, unfortunately, with Toya, as with so many American girls of the working classes, is the only aristocracy they know.

But, since Toya had learned that there were people not distinguished as to wealth nor willing to sacrifice honor to achieve it—people familiar with the best in books, art and music, she had set up an ideal, and, though she had been slow to achieve it while she remained in New York, she needed only removal from the tawdry life she must lead in dressing-rooms and restaurants to begin in earnest. Add to that Paris, the example of fellow students better educated, of better families than her own, the respect, almost veneration, for art and literature that exists in Paris even among the lower classes, and the society of Arcy's new friends, painters, authors, correspondents and the like, who wasted no time on banalities—and Toya within was soon almost worthy of Toya without. And as she had all the dark mysterious beauty of the Slavs, whose women's eyes are starry and mysterious even when they are thinking of what they will have for dinner; yet was without the Slavonic clumsiness of body, having had a mother of the Czechs, whose grace of motion makes their national dances too difficult for any but themselves—to say her mental attainments could ever come within speaking distance of her physical charms would be possible only to one of those who write bon-bon fiction or "primitive" plays: in which total changes of character are accomplished between acts and in single chapters.

Say, rather, they came within shouting distance, megaphone distance; which was quite sufficient for so pretty a girl. At all events, she had learned to know good art and good manners if not to like them; and Arcy having selected her clothes for so

long, she had developed a secondary instinct as to what suited her type; and now, in a plain, closely fitting skirt cut like a sword scabbard, with a narrow-shouldered coat, long-lined in the back and sharply curved and cut away at the waist-line, displaying her narrow waist and rounded torso in a tightly fitting semi-waistcoat of brocaded stuff, a long jabot of the softest and most expensive lace falling over it, she looked like the lady of a seventeenth century Royal Hunt; so aristocratically slender that she seemed tall, her small Greek-featured face like a vivid little flower on a long, graceful stem. It is a trick few women learn: to disregard entirely what are called the fashions, to find a style suited to their type, thereafter adhering to it. It is the device that distinguishes the successful beauty from the merely beautiful one—and is the only thing known to stir Paris, familiar to contempt with the picked beauties of the world who come to sell their charms in the highest market.

In Paris, then, wherever Toya went, she was followed by admiring, eager eyes. A Russian grand duke had his secretary seek her out to ask for an introduction. An English peer with a famous racing stable named for her a horse that was to win the Grand Prize. She did not dare walk alone on the Rivoli, the Prix, or any principal street: someone was sure to stop his motor and come to walk by her. Here a beautiful woman does not need to be on the stage to attract widespread attention: she has only to be where news is known before it reaches the newspapers—at race-courses, restaurants and *revues*; to all of which Arcy's occupation as correspondent took him, and where he soon became famous—for the constant cavalier of a beauty is a man of no small importance in the gay world of Paris. Toya's beauty was better than all his letters of introduction. Without the slightest effort, he met all the grandees whom to know is to know the news before it is printed. The official correspondent of his paper had never enjoyed such intimacy

with the famous and the wealthy. As it was soon found that Toya was not allowed to come without him, Arcy was invited to many suppers, shootings, coaching parties and other *divertissements* of English dukes, American millionaires, South American and Russian nabobs. So that Toya had not to argue, as in the past, when she brought up the marriage question. After his increase in salary, she had only to suggest.

Then, as delighted with her new dignity as a kitten with a new bow of ribbon, Toya no longer felt it a necessity to be present at every race meeting. She was seen seldomer in the Café de Paris and more often at symphony concerts and Wagnerian performances; and her teachers at the Conservatoire noted an increased progress in her studies. Being now assured that the man she wanted was tied to her securely unless she herself willed it otherwise, the question of sex was settled in her mind, and she no longer found it necessary to remind him continually, by making fresh conquests, of her desirability in other men's eyes. And, as ever since they had left America he had forbidden her to accept any presents but flowers, candy or books, she could see no further use in submitting to that boredom that came from their compliments and love-making. She now concentrated upon her career with all the extra energy hitherto expended in flirtation; and the only men she allowed to escort her were Arcy's friends and those who were interested in civilized conversation—one of whom had been for some little while that eminent financier, Carolus Lang, temporarily master of his health and an occasional visitor to Paris.

Originally she had been directed by Arcy to use all her powers to persuade some friend of Lang's to introduce her to him upon one of those flying trips; and, once met, to exert herself to the utmost to gain his friendship and confidence—all for a reason with which Toya more than sympathized: vengeance for the treachery of Milton Lazard.

IX. AN EAGLE INTERVENES

OF Carolus Lang this history is too confined to treat with that detail due his remarkable character. There has been one who has filled near upon half a thousand such pages as this, yet got no farther than the fourth decade of Lang's life. To bring him past the sixth, when he comes into this tale, would require many thousand more: even to picture him adequately, transferring to paper that sense of power which he radiated, conveying that commingling of rapacity and philanthropy, scorn of the public yet desire for applause, hatred of sham yet love of intrigue, militant money-making yet a devotion to all that is best in the arts and sciences so absorbing that he desired to share it with all the world and propagate it for posterity—all this would necessitate a lapse so long that interest would be lost in those minor persons who are our major ones.

Arcy had watched the reports of his health like a loyal subject the bulletins of the physicians attending a dying monarch: that is, since receiving the result of the investigation of Scarthwaite, owner of the *Argus*, which had resulted in the inclusion of Milton Lazard's name. Well for Leeminster had his haste not deprived that *commissionaire* of his commission. Arcy had given them the Leeminster clue, and it had been an easy task to ascertain his habits and to trace him on the night previous to Arcy's arrest.

Had the club porter requisitioned Leeminster's cab, the incident of Lazard's call might have been confused with the hundred other calls of non-members upon members that make up part of any *commissionaire's* average week. But the fact of Leeminster's brushing that porter and his legitimate commission aside to enter deliberately the cab of a notorious night-hawk, had limned every detail of the *rencontre* in the non-fad-

ing colors of indignation upon the disappointed porter's mind. He remembered Lazard's name, Leeminster's order that the caller be sent to that private card-room reserved for confidential communications, the exact duration of that particular one—everything necessary to confirm Arcy's suspicion that Lazard had been the instigator of the law's assault upon him.

And for this malignant treachery Lazard was going to pay dearly; that Arcy swore: Toya also. Her hatred for the man turned her into a little fury whenever his name was mentioned. Alone, she had been impotent: now that Arcy hated him, too, so confident was she in her chosen one, Lazard should bitterly regret each separate insult about the size of Miss Thiodolf's feet. She had never been conscious of this failing until he had loudly proclaimed it. Now she was forever conscious of it, and spent much time devising boots and pumps not so short-vamped as to be chorus-girly, yet that reduced the size of the extremities they covered to the perfection of other parts of her body. And, whenever the newest device hurt her, which was often, she thought vengefully of her lost comfort and peace of mind; and, if the requital of Lazard's treachery slumbered in Arcy, she awoke it. Next to their future, this was their absorbing topic. Ways and means suggested themselves; from such a primitive plan as having Lazard set upon by Chatham Square Apaches and beaten out of all recognizance (Toya's) to the Machiavellian methods of Arcy, too artistic to succeed anywhere except inside book covers. Even those nights when some success should have made them serenely happy were spoiled by thoughts of a swaggering blackguard still reigning over his table at Noel's, making ragtime entertainers secondary attractions, continuing to be quoted in theatrical sheets for witty sayings or doughty lies about past adventures. At such mental pictures, Arcy would champ his teeth and kick at the bed-covers: his future would be forgotten. A genuine hatred is like a great mosquito forever buzzing about the ears; until it

is slain, it is a wholesale poisoner of days and nights—even of purple ones. Nights especially; for like Macbeth it murders sleep.

During the early days of their exile, Carolus Lang had remained very low. The physicians of a king and an emperor were at the small villa at Villefranche into which Lang had been carried when he was stricken, and which his secretary, Corrie, had hastily hired, paying an extravagant price to get its occupants to go elsewhere. About this time an opera singer just arrived from America told Arcy that Lazard was wearing a magnificent stickpin, a miniature of Joardin's great statue "Io," created by the sculptor himself for the great financier, his earliest patron—a historic thing because it was the only one Joardin ever did. Carolus Lang must be very near his end: even his scatter-brained wife would not dare make such a gift unless he were; and Lazard must have inspired more than ordinary affection for her to take so great a chance. . . . Arcy's violent comments caused the songstress much amusement.

"How *can* he marry her? He's got a wife in Salt Lake City. I'm from there myself: started in the same show with her when she was a big favorite. All of us went to the wedding: we all thought she was marrying some millionaire. He talked so big we imagined he was backing the show. But one night we heard them quarreling in the dressing-room. He was going to leave her unless she handed him her pay envelope—she mustn't even break the seal. . . . I'd like to see the man who'd dare say a thing like that to *me*," she concluded, unconsciously repeating what every woman believes until she is unlucky enough to meet a Lazard and does precisely what she has despised in others.

After Arcy left her, his jubilation faded. Whether Lazard married Mrs. Lang or not, he would have the handling of the Lang millions. Her husband must be warned in time. . . .

Arcy hurried home to pack a bag, and catch the Côte d'Azur express to the Riviera. But Toya had news, too: an aviating Brazilian just returned from hydroplane feats off Villefranche had come over to her table at the Volney while she was taking tea; Lang had been seen wheeled about in an invalid-chair. If he was out again, the warning could wait. But Lazard's wife?

"Maybe she's dead now, or divorced," suggested Toya ruefully.

"Divorced," nodded Arcy; "he'd surely divorce her, knowing his chances with Mrs. Lang for months." Then, with that genius for deduction that is a concomitant of hatred: "Buy her off—maybe that's what he wanted the thousand for."

"It *is*," said Toya, clapping her hands. "It *is*. But he didn't *get* it. Who'd lend *him* a thousand?"

"If Mrs. Lang's letting him wear that stickpin, fiscal questions aren't bothering him just now. We've got to find out. I'll send a cheque to Bill Byrd and cable to have his Salt Lake agency look into this. Those Byrd men come high, but they deliver the goods."

No proof of Toya's hatred for Lazard could have been stronger than that disclosed by the scene that followed; when she wept for anger because Arcy would not permit her to use a part of Leeminster's ten thousand even to share in the cost of this investigation. But Arcy was wise. They were not married at that time, and he had heard of separations before when the woman spoke loudly of benefits conferred upon the former loved one. And to be identified, even by exaggerated accusation, with the practices of a man he loathed so much, should never be. None of that shaking of the Leeminster plum-tree should be utilized for anything except Toya's own luxuries and necessities: not even for anything in which he shared, even to the slightest degree.

In due time the first Byrd report arrived. The Salt Lake

agent had referred the search for Mrs. Lazard to the San Francisco branch. Arcy was now advised that she was singing in the Bellefont Theater, "with illustrated slides." Later, a second report told of her hegira to Reno; and the Reno branch informed him of the hiring of one of those tiny single-story four-roomed bungalows on the outskirts of the Nevada capitol; of the filing of an intention to become a resident—after the manner of all desiring a divorce. Such actions foretold a residence of some months at least. . . . "She was poverty-stricken in San Francisco. He distinctly says here that she isn't singing in any of the Reno 'honkatonks.' Someone's supplying the funds," said Arcy.

"There's only one thing *I* can't understand," Toya said, puzzled. "How is it that Lazard has so much money to spend? It isn't like him when he could give her all the evidence she needs to get the divorce right away—on the usual grounds. There's Lily and the girls Lily don't know about."

"It only proves he's given up trying to get money from anybody else and has gone straight to Mrs. Lang," elucidated Arcy, after some study. "Catch him acknowledging about Lily to *her*; even to fake up evidence! Women are suspicious enough anyway"—she gave a little interrupting sniff—"but old women must be the very devil."

With the news of Lang's increasing good health (telegraphed each day in the Monte Carlo correspondent's newsletter) added to this enforced hiatus at Reno, they could wait. Later, when Lang came to Paris, Toya was introduced the following day; on his next visit, a month later, he dined with them in their little apartment off the Madeleine, Arcy duplicating, if not adding to, the good impression Toya had made. Both received an invitation to Lang's château at Cannes, in which he was again in residence. But it was not until their visit there that Arcy felt the auspicious moment for confidences had come. And then he did not make the mistake of

endeavoring to hoodwink one so astute by pretending solicitude that was purely unselfish. He gave Lang the history of Toya's dealing with Leeminster and his own tolerance of the parasite. . . . "And isn't that all the more reason?" he finished in a fine frenzy of indignation.

Carolus Lang looked amused but in an ugly fashion. Arcy had known of Lang's long separation from his wife; but he nor anyone had an idea of the intense hatred in which the man held her. Her sins he could have pardoned; he had been as unfaithful as she. But she had made him ridiculous by her choice of rivals. Many had wondered why he had not divorced her. Arcy was the first to learn. For Lang began to explain, in a tired way as though relating a commonplace incident that bored him—

X. PLANS TO PLUCK A PEACOCK

"I LIKE you, MacThyndall. But I'm not trusting you on that account, but because you won't speak of it for fear of your enemy not getting his deserts. I knew all you've told me months ago. I want that precious pair to hope so that their disappointment will hurt all the more. One of my attorneys saw Mrs. Lazard a week after she came to Reno. She's been getting a good fat substantial sum every week, and will continue to get it so long as she keeps her husband's name—"

He paused to indulge in a satisfied smile. "She's been told to stay in Reno and take *their* money, too. How about that, my young friend?" Arcy nodded, too amazed to be exultant. "But," Lang continued, his face clouding, "that won't prevent him from— Wait," he broke off. "Since you hate him so much, you may be able to think of something I haven't. Ten years ago, even ten months, it would have been easy for me. But this damned affliction of mine has thrown me out of gear.

When a man never knows, any time he goes for a walk, whether he'll return alive or drop dead at the first corner, his mind gets atrophied. . . . I'll show you a copy of my will."

He took it from a pigeon-hole in a marquetry desk, an inlaid trifle that had once adorned a palace and was listed in collector's manuals at the price of a small competence. Arcy read, amazed: To his . . . "beloved wife, Louisa Marie Lang" . . . after certain legacies to friends and servants had been deducted, he bequeathed the . . . "income on his entire estate for life." . . . The younger man repeated this incredulously.

Lang nodded. "And if you can give me some certain way of making her accept it, I'll have a codicil added in your favor. . . ."

Seeing that Arcy was still bewildered, Lang explained; some color came to his cheeks and a sparkle to his eye as he outlined his cherished plans. His money was to be at interest for a certain number of years until, by that weird accumulation known as compound interest, it doubled: then it was to be spent in establishing three institutions for the arts and sciences. Any man or boy of a high degree of intellect who would sign a contract to remain afterward on post-graduate work for five years would be educated free and paid a wage while doing so—these to assist in the work that would be done by the masters of science, who would be induced to come there by providing the colleges with all in the way of instruments, machinery and money that would carry their researches to fruition. One college was to be in America, another in France, a third in England; and thereafter, they would be identified with the greatest discoveries for the perpetuation, saving and ameliorating of human life. Nowadays most great scientists were forced to accept funds of self-seeking capitalists, who grew rich over the result of their discoveries. That would no longer be necessary when the Lang colleges flourished: their discoveries would be for the benefit of the world at large. While, as for the arts,

any youth or girl with a decided talent for music, painting, sculpture or literature would also receive his education gratis, along with a small income. . . . Arcy stuttered, mumbled, flushed crimson, trying to find words to express his admiration of so great a humanitarian scheme.

Lang smiled wryly. "One must be either a sheep or a wolf in this world," he said gruffly. "I got tired of being a sheep, so I started to be a wolf. I made the mistake of robbing the rich, though, and they put me in jail as a low person; so when I got out I turned respectable and robbed the poor. I flatter myself, though, that this way I'm doing more good than if they'd spent it themselves. Their grand-children ought to thank God I *did* rob them." He paused. "However, to do this, I need what I've got. I can't afford to give one-third to have a feather-brained peahen hand it over to a ridiculous peacock."

"One-third—why?" queried Arcy, more puzzled than ever.

"Her dower right: that's the law. Every married woman can get one-third of her husband's entire estate if he dies without making a will. Or she can break any will that leaves her less than that. If she could have divorced me she'd have got that, at least: she couldn't for the same reason I couldn't divorce her: we canceled out. But if she accepts the will as I've made it—" Once more the ugly smile.

Arcy did some calculating. "But according to your own statement the income from the estate if left at interest will double it in a certain number of years."

Lang nodded, still smiling. "The executors of the will are scientific gentlemen who want the colleges," he said, "along with my personal friend and lawyer who's with me heart and soul. My dearly beloved little peahen can't survive me more than ten years the way she's going on. And, when she accepts the will, the executors are instructed to sell the larger part of my holdings and invest in certain safe propositions that won't pay any dividends for anything up to a decade—the new Ar-

gentine Railway for instance, that afterward will pay the holders of first mortgages something like thirty per cent. on their investment; the Philippines and Hawaiian Trolley Company's another; the new Shantung Railroad—so forth and so on—you may be sure I've studied it out pretty carefully. But don't try to take these things for tips: a hundred thousand is the least such ventures accept: such things aren't open to the small investor—don't need to be. . . . Now do you understand?"

His smile chilled Arcy: it was some time before he stammered out that he did. "You mean her income will be entirely in the hands of the executors—they can make it as little as they choose."

"Which means all the more toward the Big Scheme—precisely," returned Lang. "But being a mental light-weight, the peahen would not observe any such possibility. She'd only understand that, if she took her dower right, she'd get one-third as much income. But Lazard would alter all that. He'd want something she could settle on him—and you can't settle annuities. Unless I'm very wrong, his idea is to get possession of her property while she's in love with him, then quit. And, my way, she has *no* property. So even if he didn't suspect a trick—which he's likely to, knowing how I despise her—he'd insist on the dower right. Think as much as I will," Lang added wearily, "I can't see any way to prevent him. If he had a criminal record, if he'd done something the law could hold him for—but he's taken as good care of his skin as an old maid. And that's why I say, if you can tell me some way to make her accept that will, down goes your name in it for a good round sum. Think it over," he added, and pulled a long bell-cord, the old-fashioned château way of summoning servants, one of whom, answering, was directed to serve a hot bedtime drink useful for promoting slumber.

But it did not accomplish its purpose with Arcy. He lay awake until dawn, endeavoring to discover the last link in the

chain that was forging for his enemy. But nothing practicable suggested itself until the following morning when, sipping his chocolate in bed, his eyes remained riveted upon a blue envelope with a white address pasted thereon—the European form of telegram. Then, without the slightest effort, there was suggested that for which he had vainly racked his brain.

He leaped up, threw a dressing-gown over his pajamas, thrust his feet into Japanese slippers and hurried down the château's cold halls to where Carolus Lang still lay abed. "I've got it!" Arcy almost shouted. Rapidly he outlined what the sight of the telegram envelope had suggested: "That is, if the present Mrs. Lazard dislikes her husband nearly as much as we do."

"Set your mind at rest there," returned Lang, his state of excitement one to cause the royal physicians grave concern. "She does."

"Then it's as good as done," said Arcy jubilantly. And Carolus Lang agreed that it was.

XI. THE PLIGHT OF A PEA-HEN; HER PRAYERS; HER PURGATORY

SEVEN months later, Milton Lazard awoke one morning in the Madison Avenue mansion of the late Carolus Lang and reached out his hand mechanically (as he had done so many mornings) for his little sack of near-alfalfa and brown cigarette papers. Despite the expertness of many years, half the tobacco spilled, the other half was blown upward into his eyes; for, as he leaned over to wet the paper with his tongue, a tremendous yawn split his face in two, tears came into his eyes, his body was shaken by a hundred heaves, his mouth twitched abominably, and, altogether, he seemed in a paroxysm of pain. The cigarette paper dropped from his fingers; he fell back on his pillow.

Several times he essayed to raise himself and reach beneath the bolster; but it was not until the third time that he succeeded, drawing out a long, thin case encircled by a rubber band which held a spoon. This latter he hastily dipped into the water glass on the carved cabinet that served as a night table; on which was also a cunning device of a great silversmith, a tiny silver figurine representing a Crusader in full armor, naked blade in hand, lance couched at an imaginary Saracen. Lazard pulled at the lance-head, which fell off and dangled by a tiny silver chain, while a flame of ignited alcohol shot from the lance. Over this Lazard held his spoon until the water bubbled and boiled; upon which he filled with it a small syringe he had taken from the case. Into this, removing the piston-rod while the water boiled, he dropped four little white pellets. The water drawn in, these dissolved. Screwing on a needle so tiny as to seem but a point of light, he carefully examined his forearm, and finding a place where neither veins nor arteries interfered, he injected into his listless blood the contents of the syringe; then lay back, with his eyes closed, his features relaxed, while the drug coursed madly through his system. A foolish smile came to his face: he stretched out his limbs in an ecstasy of enjoyment, laughing aloud as the pleasant things he might do that day occurred to him. Faster than the fastest moving picture cyclorama, he had visions of an 80-90 H. P. car shooting through the greenwood; the water of the Hudson cleaved before the swiftly moving prow of one of the fastest speed boats on the river; all the pretty girls of the Casino show looked admiringly toward the box where he sat with his new and wealthy wife.

He opened his eyes, enjoying the realization of the present now the necessity for the morphine—to which he had had recourse months before that he might maintain the wit necessary to win his new wife—had been satisfied. Now he rolled his brown-paper cigarette with ease, as he lay there in a bed

which had once been a king's: a masterpiece of Florentine bronze, covered with representations of pornographic mythology—Leda and the swan, Jupiter wooing Danaë, Venus and Adonis, Diana and her hunt-maids in the brook, a rash boy peering through the reeds—many more such incidents on which a certain decadent monarch had desired to look and look again. This royal couch had been purchased for half a million francs. And a plebeian adventurer now lay upon it smoking cigarettes twenty of which did not cost a penny.

Presently he reached up and pressed one of a row of enameled buttons imbedded in an embossed globe that swung from the head of the bed. A servant appeared with coffee and fruit; another laid out Lazard's linen and clothes, summoning a third who determined to a nicety the temperature of the parasite's bath and, first sweating him, punched and pummelled his face and body into an appearance of health and strength. Emerging in a dressing-gown *La Lompadour* or *Du Barry* might have envied, Lazard permitted a dapper and impeccably attired young gentleman—who had been waiting for the past hour—to kneel and take measurements, another dapper and impeccably attired young gentleman writing them down.

"You wish us to attend to choosing the cloth? Yes, sir. We will see no one has any of the same pattern as any of yours. Shall we say a dozen lounging suits, three morning coats, one black, with pin-stripe black trousers, one gray, one fawn-colored, each with self-trousers; smoking suits (by which he meant dinner jacket), one double-breasted, one single; riding suit, knickerbocker suit—and I should advise Bedford cords, also, sir; they're very smart. (Bedford cords, also, Mr. Mink.) Then a house suit braided, with scarlet facings"—the young man seemed to go into an ecstasy. "And now as for fancy waistcoats . . ."

But we need follow this young gentleman no further. When his business was concluded, the valet brought Mr. Laz-

ard's mail in a huge basket; the tradesmen and the begging-letter writers, the secretaries of charities and a majority of those to whom Lazard had ever addressed a single word, all had been busy. He shook his head. "Later," he said; "and I can't see anybody else this morning, Wilkins, even if I *did* make appointments."

"No, sir; certainly not. Very good; thank you, sir," returned Wilkins mechanically. He had trained himself to be an automaton during working hours — although, for many years, he had ruffled it along Broadway of nights, knew Lazard's record and despised him.

"And I'm not to be disturbed by anybody, either," continued Lazard, enjoying his new importance immensely. "I shall be in consultation with Mrs. Lazard and with my attorneys and her attorneys and the late Mr. Lang's attorneys. The will's to be read to-day. Although, of course, *we* know its contents, naturally. Mrs. Lang knew the day the old gentleman died. He must have gone loony if he imagined anybody with a dome not pure concrete would stand for such foolishness; and I'm going to tell his lawyers so, too."

"And a lot they'll care what you tell 'em," thought Wilkins; but aloud he replied sympathetically: "Quite so, sir. I should if I were you, sir. They want taking down a bit, those lawyer fellows: thieves *I* call 'em, sir."

Lazard nodded his head lordily. "As full of larceny as Sing Sing," he agreed. "If you locked them up, you could turn everybody in the jails loose. They're just as harmless as a nest of baby adders. Guess they didn't reckon on having a man to deal with, or they wouldn't try to put over a raw one like this will. But they insist on a formal reading and explanation, so here goes another morning to hell and gone." He sighed wearily: Wilkins was to imagine that every moment of his master's day was as precious as rubies.

Below in the great Lang library—hung in Imperial purple,

the eagles stamped and emblazoned on draperies, upholstery and on the bindings of the handsome hand-tooled purple volumes, with Empire medallions and bronze carvings on table legs, mantels, chairs, *chaises-longues*, with the many Tanagra figurines enclosed in glass and Lang's curio cases of Napoleonic relics set into the tops of slim, straight-legged mahogany tables—sat every known species of legal sharp. There was snowy-haired Judge Cheyney (formerly of Fai'fax Co't House, suh) but for many years senior partner of Cheyney, Cholmondeley, Isaacs, McGinnis and Salvini—a firm which united all suffrages by having a representative of every prominent race that made up New York's diverse population. Sir Jameson Cholmondeley was of the recognized King's Counsel type: he looked half dressed without his snowy peruke and official robes: he had come post-haste from England—where he represented the British end of the firm—to be present at the will-reading. Isaacs was a type of highly educated Jew: he had the face of an artist, save for eyes like a shrewd peddler. McGinnis was a good-natured Tammany type, Salvini, who also conducted a bank for Neapolitans and Sicilians, a florid Italian political type.

Then there were Lazard's lawyers, redolent of Broadway flash and brash: a young Jew who wore patent-leather shoes with a lounge suit and a mathematically exact double rhomboid of a four-in-hand secured by a large solitaire, his companion the sort of American who hates foreign countries where a willingness to buy endless drinks does not admit one to the confidence of strangers or put an obligation on acquaintances to lend him money: who noisily applauds flag-waving sons and insists the eagle is more than a match for any foreign foe, but who resents extra taxes for armaments and who never enlists in time of war. This person had already said something excruciatingly funny concerning the King's Counsel's habit of carrying his handkerchief in a cuff instead of

in a hip pocket: having yet to learn that this latter medium did not exist in smartly cut garments.

Mrs. Lazard's lawyers sat with these latter ornaments to the bar: colorless persons not to be distinguished from thousands of others who wear secret-order insignia in their lapels or as watch charms; a couple as characterless as a glass of water: "pillars of society." They had been endeavoring, for some days, to convince themselves that it showed a proper respect for the deceased when their client remarried within a week; for they earnestly assured the public that they undertook no cases they did not believe beyond reproach. Having succeeded (as usual) in taming their boasted unruliness of conscience, they, like good Christian men, were now glaring at the ruffianly executors—certain staid gentlemen of vast scientific attainments who, with the former Fai'fax Co't House judge, were plotting some villainy to mulct their estimable worthy client, a woman whose character was beyond the reproach of any save rogues.

But skilled in self-deception though they were, the sight of Milton Lazard—in a suit of brown that verged upon wine color, and a flaming striped necktie, his absurdly small feet advertised by buttoned tan shoes with vivid cloth tops, his eyes greedy, his heavy brutal chin flattened over his high collar—gave them uneasy qualms; qualms that were increased by her own attire as she flaunted in on his arm. Her dress was black, to be sure, but so coquettishly cut, so scanty of skirt and tight of waist—"à la princesse"—that it resembled a stage costume more than a widow's grief, especially when allied to a coiffure of piled-up puffs, elaborately waved, and a face enameled so rigidly it seemed to creak when she spoke. If she had laughed, the whole pitiable mass might have crumbled away like wet plaster on an old ceiling. Small of figure and of features, she might have passed at a distance for a costly coryphee; near, she was a mere exhibit of uphol-

stery and kalsomining, of small charms long deceased and denied decent burial.

But she bore herself with the air of a spoiled and petted beauty: too many youths had been dependent upon her for theaters, restaurants, motor rides, gold cigarette cases and silken haberdashery to deny her that admiration as necessary to her as air. To her lawyers and Lazard's she now endeavored to convey the impression of a helpless girl relying on manly chivalry. The Lang henchmen she aimed to impress as one injured, insulted and irate, yet in her gentle goodness willing to forgive and be friends.

Lazard thinned his lips at this, indicating immense reserve forces, warning one and all that here at least was a mighty fellow grimly determined that justice should be done, able to enforce it, too: reticent and repressed now, but let all who would attempt chicanery 'ware his wrath. Which caused her lawyers to assume an air of virtue, his of outraged American independence; but which went entirely unnoticed by the callous ruffian band, who seemed as contented as pussy cats purring in anticipation of a breakfast of rich cream—all of which endured for the reading of the early portions of the will.

These dealt with pictures and curios bequeathed to societies, clubs and museums; legacies and minor bequests to friends and servants. Once only did Lazard lose his pose: imagining he had heard mentioned as one of the former a certain Robert C. MacThyndall; and for the moment he suspected something sinister in the quiet, assured air of the executor who read. There was too much calm about his companions' countenances, too. But Judge Cheyney's soft Southern intonations had slurred over Arcy's name; and Lazard assured himself he had not heard aright. How might the great Carolus Lang come to such intimacy with an obscure reporter; and in so short a time? . . . Righteous wrath soon

replaced the momentary fear when Judge Cheyney came to the section bequeathing "to my beloved wife, Louisa Marie Lang, the interest upon my entire estate for life," a wrath that grew during what seemed an interminable recital of the aims and ambitions of the three colleges of "scientific research," etc. Several times his attorneys thought it part of their duty as legal advisers to lay restraining hands on his shoulders; delaying his fiery denunciation until Judge Cheyney wiped his tortoise-shell spectacles, folded over the rustling pages of the heavily sealed document and smiled in a congratulatory manner upon the chief beneficiary; who, however, seemed as removed from gratitude as if the will had failed to mention her name.

Now she began to flutter in what, no doubt, she deemed an adorably helpless little way; her eyes beseeching her *generalissimo* and her two armies to defend her against a cruel and unexpected assault. It was the opportunity for which Lazard had been training all his life. He fired a preliminary gun in the shape of a portentous frown; and, as he rose, the enemy seemed to give him that grave attention due a foe worth considering.

"If Mrs. Lazard takes *my* advice," he began—and then the batteries of the enemy ceased immediately to be masked.

"Yuh refuh to Mrs. *Lang*, suh?" inquired the ancient judge, a schoolmaster to a schoolboy.

"*Lazard*," thundered the owner of that name, glaring about him in a manner meant to be tremendously annihilating.

Judge Cheyney shrugged his shoulders: the schoolmaster deploring the caning that the schoolboy seemed bent on making inevitable, yet which so offended the master's dignity that he sought a deputy; nodding to that member of the firm more accustomed to bellicose methods. McGinnis rose, his smile calculated to provoke further warfare. "Who?" he asked.

Lazard repeated the information in a louder tone. "And

"I'll ask you to remember it, too," he added, increasing the insult of his intonation.

"I was under the impression that Mrs. *Lazard* was in *Reno*," returned McGinnis blandly. "Only this morning we received a message from her there. I have it here. It occurred to me you might like to see it." The velvetiness of his Irish voice was never more in evidence, as he tossed it across the long, low Empire center table.

But Lazard let it lie where it had fallen. "I'm not interested in *that* person," he joined stiffly: then lost all pretense at dignity as he added, choking: "You know well enough there is only one Mrs. Lazard as far as we are concerned."

"But you speak as though there were two," said McGinnis in blank astonishment.

Something in his look and the amusement of the other enemies caused Lazard to sense again that sinister something the name of MacThyndall had evoked. But, perceiving no tangible reason therefor, he decided it was but part of the usual stock-in-trade of lawyers—first alarm, then attack; and he made an angry and pointless reply.

His and hers were on their feet now. "I must demand that my client be treated with civility at least," said the hitherto passive owner of the patent leathers. "And I wish to remind you, gentlemen, that where you fail in respect to a lady, you may be within your legal rights, but you are not acting like gentlemen," put in one of the commonplace men of the secret-order insignia. "In plain words," added the other, "our client considers this inimical to her best interests and will take an appeal—eh, Mrs. Lazard?" On this the six of them had agreed, the widow-bride having bowed to the majority when the worst interpretation of her late husband's intentions had confirmed Lazard's denunciations. And, as now he was favoring her with a terrific scowl, she made haste to nod.

"But why, my dear sir?" asked the King's Counsel, as though consumed with curiosity, and addressing McGinnis who, as spokesman, remained standing. "Why does everyone continue to address Mrs. Lang as Mrs. Lazard?"

McGinnis spread his palms. "I suppose I'll have to read the real Mrs. Lazard's telegram before they will believe it," he said; and reached across the table where the yellow slip still lay. "Kindly give your attention, everyone:

"Night Letter.

"RENO, NEVADA, November 6th.

"Whoever sent a telegram stating I am divorced from my husband Milton Soulsbee Lazard lied and forged my name. Cannot believe any such telegram was ever sent unless someone did it as a joke. My husband and I are on the best of terms. He sends me money regularly, as records of National bank here will show. Perhaps my being in Reno gave rise to this rumor. Am here for my health, mountain air, doctor's orders. Will never divorce my dear husband.

"It is signed 'Minnie Lazard,' " added McGinnis, crossing and indicating the signature, while placing the telegram in the hands of Carolus Lang's widow. "'Minerva Mortimer' in parentheses. Stage name, I suppose. And now, Mrs. Lang, that you see how you have been victimized, it is up to you as to what you want us to do in this unpleasant matter. Shall we place the matter in the hands of the proper legal authorities? Or, to save you the unpleasant notoriety, the somewhat uncomfortable sensation of having the world know you have been the victim of a bigamist, we are willing to do what we can to assist *you* if you will assist *us* by signifying your acceptance of the will as executed, saving us the expense and trouble of any attempt to break it."

He paused, taking a deep and satisfied breath, totally disregarding the Lazard lawyers and those of Mrs. Lang, who were loud in accusations of blackmail and conspiracy. As for Lazard, who had been for the moment in a condition of

shock, he had now regained his assurance and was proclaiming wildly that the telegram was a subterfuge.

"Don't you think we've got you for that little dodge?" he shouted, shaking his fist in McGinnis's face. "A trick to make her accept a double-crossing will. It must be pretty fishy if you have to stoop to a trick like that. I've got the telegram from Minnie, haven't I?" he demanded of the now hysterical little woman. "I'll get it and show it to you again."

"The point is, however," interrupted McGinnis pleasantly, "that Mrs. Lazard did not send it. As she suggests, it may have been sent as a joke—but the joke is on Mrs. Lang, and we don't care for that sort of joke—I beg your pardon, sir."

He addressed his apology to his senior, Sir Jameson Cholmondeley, K.C.B., who had risen, frowning.

"Gentlemen," he protested, in tones of insulted probity. "Gentlemen—" His attitude coupled with his formidable dignity denoted danger; even Lazard was silenced when the K.C. turned a chilly look toward him. "I have heard a firm with which I have been associated for nearly half a century accused of an attempt to commit a criminal act," continued Sir James. "Under the circumstances, I feel called upon to repeat my words of last night, and to demand, instead of request, that nothing be done which will render my colleagues accomplices in concealing a crime." He turned to the youngest member of the firm. "Telephone for an officer, Mr. Salvini," he directed. "Lay before the department the evidence of bigamy against this offensive person, Lazard. Let his attorneys communicate with us in future by mail. We will have no more such disgraceful exhibitions. We do not care to hear any more from *you*, sir," he added pointedly, addressing the flag-waver, the drink-purchaser, who had been most aggressive in his charges of fraud.

There was instant silence; then Salvini's voice could be heard asking that the Chief of Detectives despatch with all speed two plain-clothes men. It was evident that he then

listened while that official asked for particulars to fill out a warrant. "The name is Milton Lazard, occupation unknown, age thirty-odd, native of Nebraska; the charge is—"

But Lazard had reached him ere now, had placed a nervous shaking hand over the telephone receiver. "Don't—don't!" he entreated. "You've got me, I guess. I'll do whatever you say"—as in another age the misshapen jester, his ancestor, had crouched on the cobbles of the courtyard and kissed his master's feet that the threatening lash might not descend upon him.

Salvini, somewhat disconcerted, beckoned McGinnis, who took his place: the great McGinnis, a power in police eyes, a politician who could with a nod destroy even detective chiefs.

"It's all right, my boy—McGinnis talking . . . yes, Aloysius P. Hold the line a minute." He covered both receiver and transmitter, and turned. "You've got just one minute to decide in, Mr. Lazard," he said. "Leave this room and take your representatives with you, or leave it in custody. Hurry! I can't keep the chief waiting. He's apt to grow peevish—"

McGinnis grinned. Lazard turned to his lawyers: "It's a frame-up," he said sullenly.

McGinnis uncovered the transmitter. "Chief—" he began.

"Wait, wait," said Lazard, terror-stricken. "We're going—we're going. Come on, boys." And, herding his attorneys, who tried to detain him, he made an inglorious exit.

"Now, Mrs. Lang?" McGinnis used a gentler tone, but did not alter his position at the telephone; though the commonplace men were protesting that such actions were high-handed outrages that all present should bitterly repent.

"It's simply a question of whether you wish to be our friends or not," continued McGinnis calmly. "Yes, yes, Chief," he interpolated; "I ask you to wait, please. . . . Mrs. Lang, you see how impatient he is. . . . If you are going to accept this will, please sign the acceptance—Isaacs, please."

His partner moved toward her, offering her his fountain pen, indicating the place of signature. "If you wish to cause us trouble and annoyance, take the advice of the bigamist who has deliberately deceived you." McGinnis could not make his usual gesture, for his hands were engaged: his face, however, was expressive.

"What would you *do*?" she shrilled in falsetto, fluttering in earnest this time.

"He will be arrested and undoubtedly sentenced, and the world will know how you have been victimized," put in the King's Counsel, interposing bluffly.

"Tut, tut, Suh Jameson," muttered Judge Cheyney. "An honored name? Nonsense, suh. Now if the will were unfair to you, dear lady . . . But you keep youah house here, youah Newport villa, youah château at Cannes. Whereas, if you broke the will and secured youah dower, youah income would not permit such extravagances. This man, Lazard, wished the will broken so that he could lay his hands on ready money. . . ."

Again McGinnis quieted the unruly official at the other end of the wire—or seemed to do so. In face of both arguments, and despite the warnings of her counsel, she seized Isaac's pen. "There," she said petulantly. And signed.

She could never be persuaded thereafter that Lazard was not in some way responsible for her future misfortunes. One by one, as the years passed and Lang's instructions were obeyed, she saw her houses go: first the Newport villa, then the Madison Avenue mansion, until she had only the Cannes château where, like her husband, she went to die. However, she lived longer than if she had had the entire income to lavish upon other young men, or her dower right to squander upon Lucullan luxury. By reducing her to fifty thousand a year the executors added an extra decade, which gave the good priests of Cannes the opportunity to frighten her into

fear of a future state; causing the fatuous old sinner to imagine that at so advanced an hour she might cheat the devil of his due; and, once convinced that further dissipation would speedily end her days, she put in a belated bid for the least purchasable of all things—with the encouragement of the holy fathers. Sir Jameson Cholmondeley, believing in the efficacy of such repentances, overruled the *savant* executors, and at any rate the Rest House of St. Mary Sulpicia profited: a certain number of penniless people may always find bed and board there, thanks to her donation. Even she could not die without the world having benefited somewhat.

XII. THE PEACOCK TRIES BEING A VULTURE AGAIN—BUT VAINLY

LAZARD left the house before an investigation of his luggage could be made. It was not until he again examined that luggage minutely, in the comparative safety of a steamer headed for a Latin-American city where he would be non-extraditable, that he discovered that in his valet, Wilkins, he had had the services of a brother craftsman; who, perverting the golden rule in his case as Lazard had done in the case of Lang, had removed many of the more important exhibits in the collection of stickpins, cuff links, jeweled waistcoat buttons and other *bijouterie* that Mrs. Lang had given the object of her admiration. So that all Lazard had to show for his residence in the Lang house was now worth but a few thousands. Thus, a few weeks later, a pitiful letter reached the Lang executors through Lazard's lawyers, and its contemptuous answer allowed him to return to a country where his gift of language might again earn him a livelihood. A bitter experience at the hands of the customs officials awaited him. Not having been abroad before, he had shown the remainder of the Lang jewelry to a female passenger

he was endeavoring to impress, and, some of the cabin stewards being, as usual, customs spies, Lazard was disagreeably surprised on landing by a request for its history. Not daring to give a real one, he must sell some gems to pay the duty: was thus mulcted of a large portion of all he had saved from the wreck of his high hopes.

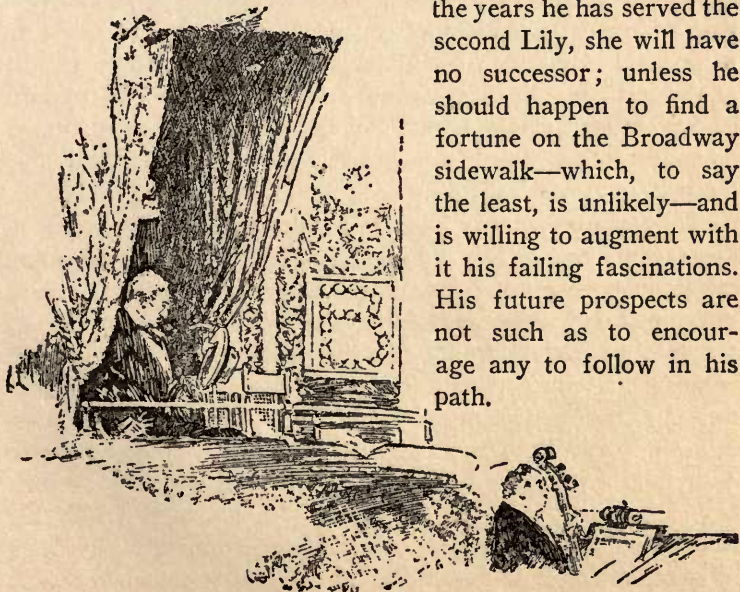
A little later, as the news of his return spread along Broadway, Lily Lamotte's husband called upon him, administered a severe thrashing and a warning that, if he heard of any further reminiscences involving Lily's name, he would call again with a revolver. This man had known Lily when she was Lazard's appanage, had been deceived by her for him; but, despite this, had hurried to her at the first announcement of the second marriage of Mrs. Lang; having been as unable to conquer his passion as the average drunkard. Being a moody and morose person, with a superb chest development and a hard-hitting record, he was quite able to gain for his wife the respect in which a man wishes his wife to be held. So that Lily Lamotte, nowadays, moves in one of the best *bourgeois* circles, and seems one of the most typical of her many female acquaintances therein. Lazard always looks the other way if by any chance they meet in public places.

He was even more of a hero to the new court he gathered about him than to the old; for, the true facts of the Lang catastrophe never even reaching the servants, he was free to interpret his ejection in his own way, and was pointed out as a man who, having won a fortune, deliberately abandoned it because his nature turned in disgust against rendering affection to a dyed and painted old woman. "I thought I could do it, but it would have been easier to make the Statue of Liberty do a turkey trot," he has said many thousand times. Which tale of temperament, added to the "fame" with which his supposed marriage had covered him, won him the affections of another Lily. On Broadway when nasty notorieties pack

the theaters and capable histrions in craftsman-like plays can draw only average audiences, it does not matter how one becomes "famous" so long as it is accomplished.

Curiously enough, Lily the Second is evening the score for Lily the First and for all the others. Lazard, after winning her by indifference, has become violently infatuated, thus cooling her ardor; and is now retained only because he works harder in her service than would a press agent on a salary; so that for her vaudeville engagements the remuneration has been raised. Now, indeed, is there truth in his former statement that he receives only "half an orange in the morning and a sack of tobacco a week"; and some day, when her heart is touched anew, he will find himself in the position in which he has placed so many other men. Then abandonment, and as formula for wit has become general along the Nightless Lane, and his girth and chins have increased during

the years he has served the second Lily, she will have no successor; unless he should happen to find a fortune on the Broadway sidewalk—which, to say the least, is unlikely—and is willing to augment with it his failing fascinations. His future prospects are not such as to encourage any to follow in his path.



Book II

LADYBIRDS IN LUCK

Book II
LADYBIRDS IN TUCK

BOOK II

LADYBIRDS IN LUCK

I. MISS FORTUNE



MISS FORTUNE, whose name, by the deletion of a single sibilant, becomes Misfortune, is, in actuality, seldom further removed from that same Antithesis: the two are truly twins; and as no life can contain one without the other, it is best to have the Antithesis first and get it over with.

One has only to live long enough for Miss Fortune to appear. And she is found in the strangest places . . . for

instance, Irving Feinberg's Palace of Oriental Pleasure, before which Violet Vandam hesitated one night, uncertain as to whether she should pursue a habit that, though giving her tired body rest and her brain surcease, she had been warned would lead inevitably to a mortifying end. Thus it would seem she should have conquered her craving and gone her way—to Fortune; yet the Antithesis was lurching around the corner in the shape of a drunken man who was, in reality, a plain-clothes man, his vivid jewelry a bait no impecunious

outcast like Violet could have resisted; so another name would have been added to the "front-office dick's" credit on the police blotter and to his discredit with the Recording Angel; while, within Irving Feinberg's dark doorway, Miss Fortune hovered with folded wings. Those who feel themselves capable of giving God points on the stage-management of the Divine Comedy (which they call Drama and treat as Melodrama) would have called her entrance into this "den" another false step—she had taken the first one some time since—yet it was in reality aviation; though no one, no matter how gifted, could have guessed it, for, after being admitted into Miss Fortune's presence, there was to be seen nothing even remotely suggesting her.

But, then, it was very dim there; only a few filigreed Moorish lanterns giving light; except for the many little lamps burning peanut oil to keep their flames steady, one to each bunk, along with one long bamboo pipe and one, sometimes two, persons using it. The bunks were built into the wall, two rows of them, one atop another, the general scheme not unlike a Pullman sleeping-car. All were occupied when Violet entered, a fact brought to her attention none too graciously by Mr. Feinberg, a lean, handsome young Jew who wore silk shirts, monogramed, socks and ties to match; and who did not care particularly for women patrons: they boasted and brought trouble and some were inane enough to "steer suckers" there. He suggested that Violet had better not wait: this, too, paradoxical as it may seem, dictated by Miss Fortune, who had decided to-night was the night for her entrance into Violet's life comedy; for Feinberg voiced it loudly enough to attract the attention of Mr. Phillips, who otherwise might have continued dozing—thus missing all of Fortune's future gifts.

Franklin Phillips looked up and saw a tall, slender girl with a rare shade of auburn hair and odd Japanese-like eyes;

and, being attracted by the Burne-Jones type of beauty, was able to perceive it when met with; even when thoroughly disguised by the sort of garments that were attention-compelling, and an advertisement, on Broadway after midnight. Moreover, his indulgence of the past hour, following upon an unusually lucky week, had put him in a philanthropic mood; and, if ever there was one upon whom philanthropy could be successfully practised, this tired-eyed girl was she.

"Come on over," he said. "Bring another card, Chief." She thanked him mutely; and, since there is a freemasonry in such places which dispenses with introductions and ceremony, said nothing until she had removed her hat and shoes, loosened her dress and laid her head upon the pillow opposite his: a tray, with a multifarious collection of steel cooking-needles, a sponge and other necessary articles, including the lamp with the steady little flame, separating them. Mr. Feinberg added to the collection a playing card upon which was stuck something resembling a flattened chocolate cream, which, when cooked over the steady flame, exuded an odor that increased the probability of the chocolate-cream hypothesis, but that broke into an amazing number of tiny brown bits. One by one, these were attached to the clay bowl of the long bamboo pipe, and handed to Violet, who converted them into smoke. Meanwhile, the philanthropist, moved by Miss Fortune, urged confidences and criticised.

Violet had not been occupied by her present mode of life for more than a week; nor had she been a success; her unconquerable timidity preventing her from taking the initiative in any street acquaintanceship; so that her few adventures had been confined to other than the rowdy sort not averse to some remnant of modesty and reserve. But these were so very scarce that her room rent had not been paid.

Her story was not an unusual one: she had worked in a department store several years, resenting the familiarities

of males and resisting their importunities; until Jim Healey had been appointed to the haberdashery department over the way. *His* familiarities she almost welcomed; and, as his wages were not greatly in excess of her own, they could not forever be at the moving-picture shows nor at the Island; so, after winter made all the green benches from Washington Square to Central Park untenable, there was only her single room in which to sit; and, here, familiarities grew inevitably into importunities, this time unresisted: then, afterward, with the example of other department-store couples to give some show of sanction, they found that, by pooling their wages, they could have a sitting-room, and could eat more frequently if they committed themselves frankly to a gas stove. But Jim's promotion to traveling salesman for a brand of neckties he had used his department-store position to "push" broke up the Arcadia; and after the first few weeks, he found he had been over-sanguine in assuring her he would be able to remit a weekly modicum. Violet had tried one room again and existence upon her weekly six dollars, but soon sickened of it, listening to a young man in gay tweeds who had been the most attractive of recent importuners; then she was late at the store three times and lost her position: afterward fell sick and the young man in gay tweeds ceased to call. . . . Weak and ill, looking for new work, she had met another girl who had, in pity, bought her lunch and given her certain points of a profession to which the shopgirl listened in horror. Yet, after another week and no work . . . It was that same girl who had brought her to Feinberg's the only other time she had been there: "To put some life into her, to cheer her up"; and, as never in her life had she felt more need of life and cheer than to-night, here she was.

"You poor kid," said Phillips. His "monaker," because of his discourse, which admiring friends claimed would persuade the wildest granger to exhume the red sock from under the

pigpen, was "Con"; and he was a gentleman of such persuasive parts that he had also managed, in all instances, to leave the courts of justice without the least perceptible stain on his character; in each case protesting his citizen's right not to be "mugged" until after conviction, so that the police had no photographic reminders of his past annoyances. But, to-night, he was not in character, and permitted himself the luxury of being genuine. "You certainly *are* a poor kid. You're *all* poor kids. No sense of values. No knowledge of masculine natures. No psychology. No management. No *wonder* you're all poor kids!"

He shook his head dolefully. "All waste," he said. "Look at yourself. Pretty as a picture. Don't deny it. I know you don't look like a picture, but that's because you're dressed in atrocious taste. You're not even wearing the right colors. For the same price you paid for those droopy, sad-looking plumes and that big, floppy hat, you could have got a neat tailor-made affair with one quill; and your value 'ud gone up ten per cent. And for that gingerbreadly imitation of a rotten French model, a neat plain jacket and skirt: twenty per cent. more. And shoes—instead of those silly-looking Cuban heels that make you teeter along like a Chinese lily . . . And that foolish blouse with all the knots and patches of imitation lace which never look clean even when they're just home from the laundry . . . how do you *expect* to look like a picture?"

She told him, dolefully, that she did not. "But you *should*," he persisted; he was on his favorite hobby now, and the indulgence of the night gave him additional eloquence. She might have been the record roll of an automatic piano, so accurately was each detail of his speech etched on her mind. She began to see herself transformed as *he* saw her: a new and conquering Violet. "I tell you it's clothes, clothes, clothes. Look at me: they say I'd look well in *anything*. Well, they ought to see a picture of me *in* anything: as funny a looking

guy as ever was allowed to scare crows out of the corn; but now I pay as much attention to my made-to-order collars and shirts as I do to my clothes." And colors! I try half a dozen ties on each morning before I'm satisfied. . . . I'd like to dress *you*, *once*, the way you *ought* to be dressed: you'd *see*."

He eyed her speculatively, the look of philanthropy deepening in his eyes. "I've got a good mind to," he said. "It'd be worth it. Why, listen, little girl: if you were dressed right and put on the stage, there'd be a crowd of Johns pushing each other under one another's taxis, hoping each other would die so you could be their particular pet . . . no kidding. But, before that, you'd have to know how to *manage* them: have to read up on *la-de-dah* manners and customs: have to have *some* intelligent conversation . . . but, then, you girls *never* read anything."

"What *should* I read?" she asked, wide-eyed.

:"Aw, *you* wouldn't *do* it," he responded, regretfully, with the knowledge of experience. However, she insisted, and, optimism being a fruit of Feinberg's hospitality, "Con" Phillips wrote down a list of authors and another of segregated books. "English novels are the best. You sorta absorb snobbery from them. But snobbery's what a girl needs to get along: don't make the mistake of putting it on with your friends, though—it's only a business language. . . . But that isn't all, either. A girl can have the style and the snobbery and still fall down. It's being on *sale*; being on sale crabs the whole thing, d'you understand?"

She shook her head, folding the penciled list as though it were a banknote of large denomination, tucking it away in a most private place; regarding him the while with an eager, anxious gaze.

"Well, it's like this: the fellows who give women lots of money don't *want* women on sale. 'Cause why? 'Cause if

they're on sale, that means anybody and almost everybody can *buy*—while rich men want something only *they* can buy. That's why they pay a hundred thousand for a picture by an old master, have each piece of their china signed, pay fortunes for rugs and hand-carved ivories, have special liveries for their footmen, crests for their writing-paper and carriage panels, and make their tailors promise nobody else shall have a suit cut from any pattern of cloth theirs is—see? They want something the mob *can't* buy, something only they *can*. It's the same when it comes to women—only more so. That's why you see some girls riding around in big 90-horsepower cars, wearing five-hundred-dollar gowns and five-thousand-dollar rings, while others, twice as pretty, grab shorts—street-cars I mean. The first kind played biggity until the right fellow showed up: the street-car bunch was just naturally kind to strangers—all breeds. So when a rich man *did* get an eyeful, somebody squealed: 'Oh, anybody can get *her*'—crabbed before she started. But from what you say nobody's seen you around, yet; all *you've* got to do is get some regular rags and a job in a Broadway chorus, live on your salary, and wait."

Her eyes filled as she saw outlined, so clearly and certainly, something she was quite unable to accomplish. The tears decided Mr. Franklin Phillips; his philanthropy pyramided and he saw himself, at no very future date, sitting opposite a magnificently groomed woman, who doffed her languid and affected manners for him alone, to his triumphant: "I told you so." It would afford him the utmost personal satisfaction to punctuate his theories in future with irrefutable references to one who had found them practical; especially as he was not likely to discover again, in so low an estate, a girl with such manifest possibilities. Then, too—an advantage not to be overlooked by one who never knew when he would require bail and other outside assistance in case of a "tumble"—she

would be much more grateful than the actual investment warranted. Of her success if she followed his suggestions, even partly, he had no shadow of doubt: such eyes, hair, slim hands and feet, slender figure. . . . Why, he was not unaffected himself, and he was a connoisseur: how, then, with less esthetic persons, especially when she had lacy lingerie, pitter-patter shoes, clothes and colors befitting her?

Carefully he restrained any show of personal affection, for he did not wish her to consider him in any way connected with his future after to-morrow. A woman was dangerous to one of his profession. He yawned.

"Tell you what: I happen to have a roll as big as a dime's worth of spinach. I'll probably try to break the bookmakers with it—that means lose; so I'll just take a chance with you: make an investment. It'll be fun for me, dressing up a woman the way I've always wanted to: then I'll lead you out into the center of Broadway, press a week's shed and doughnut money in your mitt, turn your nose toward a manager's office, and grab a rattler for Chicago. You can write me every now and then how you're getting on—if you're on the *square* with that look, you only need a chance—and, when I'm broke, I might ask you to stake me to a new B. R.—see?—so you better be there with the success stuff."

He yawned again: as though facing an inevitable which he did not welcome particularly, only accepted; yet, at that moment, his traitorous mind was asking him: "Why Chicago? Why not see your investment yield?" But he knew, if he remained, he would allow no such procedure: it would be easy to make of her a Frankenstein monster that would claim too much of his life. So he yawned for the third time, and spoke while the yawn lasted: "Well, shall we go . . .?"

The dazed girl followed him as a dog its master.

II

No sooner had Franklin Phillips left her next day and taken the Chicago train than he was consumed with regret that he had not stayed at least a day or so longer, telling himself it was his duty to have finished the work he had begun: to have seen to it that, were she repulsed by one manager, she should be directed to another and informed of an infallible system. Which was his way of deceiving himself as to the impression she had made on him. But he need not have worried: any girls with looks capable of charming "Con" Phillips out of several "centuries" needed no assistance in dealing with the marketers of feminine pulchritude—now that her charms were framed expensively and tastefully, and she was no longer a stray derelict but provided with rudder and compass in the shape of belief in herself and scorn for susceptible mankind; both of which Mr. Phillips had been at some pains further to inculcate in her.

When he left her standing on the curb of upper Broadway, a biscuit toss from that famous restaurant, Curate's, once an unattainable Elysium, she became almost immediately conscious that a well-dressed man, who had been walking briskly had begun to loiter nearby. His name she was never to know, nor did he again enter into her life; but in that moment she saw staged other scenes of Franklin Phillip's verbal play, "The Triumphs of the Beauty Errant." The day before, such a man would have looked no further than her floppy, feathery hat, her badly fitting, pretentious clothes; but now that she had shed them, as the caddis worm its house, and flown out on iridescent wings, he was actually allowing important affairs to wait—he was such a solid-looking fellow and he had walked so briskly—in the mere hope of a chance occurring that would enable him to address her! What pleased her even

more was that, though his admiration was unfeigned, he did not dare approach without excuses. She preened herself a little, lifted her chin, and walked on in the style of an accustomed conqueror.

Miss Fortune had sent *him*, too; for, though Violet had listened and believed, she had been very humble in the presence of Mr. Phillips; and, when he left her there on Broadway, it was as though a stick had been removed from a radiant climbing vine. For all her gay expensive gown, her simple, costly, wide-brimmed hat, her dainty little shoes, her hair and skin glowing from the diligent efforts of beauty-parlor artists, she had felt forlorn and helpless. Her brilliant future had seemed probable enough under the persuasive eloquence of Mr. Phillips; but—well, she needed just such a tangible manifestation as the solid-looking man's respectful admiration. Now she reflected that she had been a fool to doubt anyone so nearly divine as her benefactor. "Always remember, it is not that you are such a sharp, but that the world is such a flat," had been his parting admonition; "especially on Broadway, where almost everybody is bluffing at being something he isn't. With your good looks set off by those clothes, if you can't be a Ninon de l'Enclos you ought to go die. Anybody ought to get *by* in this stupid world—once they've had their chance."

He was so scornfully wise, she thought wistfully; if he could only have stayed, she would have been a star in a year. Then ambition seized her. Independent of any desire for aggrandizement, she aspired to achieve that she might win his praise. She had no notion who he was, nor what his occupation, aims, antecedents: only knew that last night, when he had condescended to caress her as one might a pet kitten, she had been raised to the *n*th degree of enchantment. She would have been content to have remained an adoring kitten had he stayed—for his careless caresses to have done damnable

things; but it was apparent that a pet kitten could not *hold* him; that he had an unrealized vision of a magnificent creature, skilled in the arts of dress and conversation, learned in booklore; able, industrious, even illustrious. If he could see that vision realized in *her*, maybe next time he saw her . . .

In that moment, other men ceased to exist for Violet, save only as means to an end. She became a woman with a purpose. Such being the case, she would not deviate from it through any other emotions, for there would *be* no other emotions. A woman can succeed only by following one star: she has not enough trained ability to follow several; and knowing this, subconsciously, she becomes deaf to pity, mercy, kindness, enjoyment—all the things of life that interfere with her purpose—until she has achieved it. So, when Violet Vandam walked into her future manager's office, she was clad in a coat of mail, helmeted, greaved, corseleted, spurred and sworded. Soft and clinging to the eye, she was steel to the touch; and confidence in her armor and weapons gave her an air of haughty aloofness no unassisted effort could have achieved. It impressed the impression-proof office boy who, daily, had a hundred tales of unrealized importance tried on him by strategic unknowns seeking to storm the managerial fortress. It impressed the manager's secretary and general factotum when the awed office boy brought Violet within the keep. It even impressed the brain-fagged gentleman in the job too big for his abilities: and *he* saw daily hundreds of Cleopatras and Circes.

He gave her a note to his producer; a sealed note urging him, even if he had already picked his chorus, to replace one with this new find; for the manager's projected show was a summer show and, though he paid enormous salaries to comedians and prima donnas, dancers and eccentrics, he knew that, without a female chorus that would arouse in each male seat-purchaser the hope of or the desire to become personally

acquainted, his show was forty per cent. finance. The chorus girl was star: you saw her pictures in dress clothes, street clothes, short clothes, ballet clothes, no clothes—almost; and these pictures must have pretty faces and dazzling limbs, or the costumes were wasted. Experience? Bah—he had the great Bob Ledyard who could make a professional out of an amateur in three weeks' rehearsal; the younger the better—they worked harder and didn't tell you they were there as a favor to the management and that their wages didn't pay for their maids and taxicabs.

Violet never needed the note; so later she broke it open and, reading what the manager had written, gained extra hope in realizing her vision. When she arrived, Bob Ledyard had not yet picked his chorus. Upon the great Garden stage five hundred girls were arranged in tiers, a ballroom scene having been set by Bob's orders and the girls told to stand on the thirty-five steps. Violet was guided by an assistant stage-manager to a group of about her height. In a chair placed in the exact center of the stage "apron"—that semicircle of painted tin where are the footlights—Bob Ledyard's mighty bulk reposed, and he surveyed the assembled applicants with an eye that held only impersonal regard for the best effects to be gained by selecting one-fifth of the five hundred applicants. Presently he began to call the names of girls who had worked for him before and whom he had found satisfactory: only the best of these, however, for he perceived many fresh and blooming faces among the newcomers, and sentiment could not be allowed to sway him; with five rival summer shows he must have the prettiest chorus. When it came the strangers' turn, Violet was the first one at whom he pointed his finger. She came down to him as she had seen the others do.

Something in his face, scornful yet kindly and efficient, that reminded her somehow of Phillips—told her to drop her pose in Ledyard's presence: told her that she should be truth-

ful. "Dancer?" he asked. "I *like* to dance," she replied. "Sing?" "I *like* to sing, too." "Like to *work*?" he asked, smiling: she understood a doubt had occurred to him because of her expensive clothes. "You wouldn't *keep* me if I didn't *work*, would you?" she asked naively; "and I've *got* to work to *live*: besides, I want to be a *big actress*." She said it all in a breath, knowing among so many girls she would be lost unless she managed to make a favorable impression now. And she did: Ledyard smiled with a sort of impersonal affection; in this musical-comedy world of lazy beauties, stupid beauties, insolent beauties, it was downright encouraging to meet a beauty who wanted to live on her wages and work to succeed. Her name, when she gave it, was penciled on Bob's mind as well as on his secretary's books. He crossed to the piano and whispered to the musical director.

"No matter what kind of pipes that girl's got, keep her. Her face and figure's worth it. If she can't sing, I'll make a dancer out of her." But Violet *could* sing: not extraordinarily, not sufficiently well to be retained for her voice alone, but with a sort of tremulous wistfulness, that, in a star, with the orchestra at pianissimo pitch, is called by the critics "small but sweet." Her dancing, too, had quality: it was the graceful, untrained swaying of a healthy young animal. After the first day or so, Ledyard began to wonder if he should not do something with her.

In a summer show, a so-called *revue*—at all events patterned after the Parisian model to the extent that there are numerous unconnected scenes requiring many new characters to appear briefly and forever after be still—some of the chorus people are selected with an eye to past performances in the matter of "bits," the playing of small parts; so it lies within the power of the producer to raise many to the temporary prominence of "lines"; necessities of the libretto that have been responsible for many accidental first-night "hits." And,

as Violet accepted Ledyard as the avatar of the absent Phillips—a person who could help her to realize her vision—she was so industrious about practising difficult dance steps in the wings and at home that Ledyard, after fuming and swearing over a group of *difficile* dancers, one day turned them over to Violet. “I can’t waste any more time with you,” he said furiously; “let this little girl here—who seems to have some human intelligence—try to beat it into your pure concrete domes”—and sent them downstairs to a dressing-room. From that time on, when the librettist had lines he did not know where to place, Ledyard gave them to Violet, until, by the time the show opened, she was playing a messenger boy in Scene I, a shopgirl in Scene IV, Lady Diana Carstairs in Act II, Scene I, and The American Beauty in the finale, none existing for a longer period than two minutes, nor requiring the versatility their varied character would seem to indicate: in fact, serving only one good purpose—to bring Violet to the attention of the management so that when Ledyard suggested her for a small but striking part in an operetta he rehearsed next, they had sufficient knowledge of her to accede. The operetta never saw New York: one of those spineless affairs bought only because a foreign composer’s belated hit with another sow permitted him to rid himself at exorbitant prices of much early provincial work that smelled strongly of the German domestic virtues, it expired “on the one-nighters”; but Ledyard gained further confidence in Violet’s ability, and, as the management desired “to save a salary,” brought her back to the Garden and the show where she had begun; no longer as a chorus girl but in the part of a resigning “principal.”

A long and tedious tour followed—week, half-week and one-night stands in cities, towns and hamlets: the names of half the latter unknown to the players, sleeping on a train that took them to one for a *mantinée*, another train and another town for the evening’s performance, a third train and a

longer "jump" to make the next night stand—and so on *ad nauseam*. Violet's only consolations were the occasional letters she received from Phillips—who seemed to cover as much ground as she did, his postmarks always different—and the books he continued to recommend, of which she laid in a supply for her travels; gaining no particular popularity with companions for preferring puerile printed words to their sprightly, entertaining and scathing discourse about "rubes" and "rube towns," unappreciative managements, rotten librettists who couldn't write decent parts for magnetic artistes, composers whose tunes they had sung years before he wrote them, press agents who were always getting stuff in the papers about the show and not about them. But Violet was firm: Phillips had warned her of danger here.

"Most theatrical people never read anything but press notices and the *Morning Clarion*, never think there is any necessity to improve themselves—trusting in God's recognition of their innate superior qualities," he wrote. "If you stick around much with that mob you'll only learn to love yourself passionately, incessantly. No company is preferable to poor company. Anyhow, superior people are never lonely: they've got too much to study and think about, too much to read. You *should* come back from this road tour fairly well educated . . ."

Which she did. But her study on the road brought her something else—for, following the advice of Phillips's avatar, Ledyard, she had "gotten up" in the more important female rôles, and this saved the sending on of an expensive substitute when one "featured" player went under the knife in St. Louis. So, by way of recompense, the management had directed the librettist of the new summer show to fit her with a "regular" part, and Ledyard used her as the exponent of a style of sensational dancing and pantomime—mostly "fake"—which was then exciting the impressionable and ignorant New York public: a "vampire" dance, of which the chief

requirements were that one should have a pretty face, pretty limbs and a graceful body. Attired only in a silver sheath that stretched diagonally from left shoulder to right thigh, with a huge rose pinned in its center, and her fine spun hair loose over her shoulders—the remainder of her body bare—Violet made blasé first-nighters gasp and speak of her thickly; and, as she stood at the top of a woodland path in ghostly moonlight, would have caused Burne Jones to scorn his famous Vampire and paint another with her as model.

Thus she became one of those wild instantaneous "hits" that New York idealizes one year and forgets the next, unless a duplicate sensation is provided. In reality, Violet did nothing unusual: only played a temptation scene with a shepherd boy supposed, finally, to fall dead for love of her: this in crude dancing and pantomime, the story printed on the program, so primitive anyhow that it needed no great skill to elucidate its action. Still, had she not gained poise and presence by hard working experience, she would have made false steps, betrayed nervousness in her movements. As it was, she was hailed by the most absurd metropolitan critics in the world as the "peer of any Russian Queen of Terpsichore"—a judgment indicative of their absolute lack of knowledge of a splendid and sufficient art, a phrase quoted widely on "three" and "eight-sheets," "heralds" and "dodgers," until every bill-board and ash-can bore mute witness to Violet's fame. But Phillips had taught her to be analytic, and she knew it had been only another triumph for his theory: *he* had raised her to a middle estate by proper costuming, *Ledyard* to a high one by supreme artistry of scene as well.

And so there happened that which Ledyard afterward declared gave him incipient heart-failure: the thing that had never been done, never would be again. Waiting for the others to arrive for rehearsal the next afternoon, actually looking up from a bundle of press cuttings designating her "won-

drous," "incomparable," "divinely delightful" . . . Violet Vandam had caught his eye, colored and smiled.

"Its all *you*, Big Chief," she said: "*I* know. You painted a great picture, then dressed me up and stuck me in the center. *Your lights*—what *wonderful* lights, *your* scene, *your* pose, *your* scheme . . . and these foolish papers give all the credit to *me*. But"—she crossed and laid her arm affectionately on his shoulder—"we know—don't we?"

Ledyard gulped once or twice, tried to speak, failed, and stared at her, unbelievably; finally gasping out: "Vi, I'm sorry, but you weren't meant for this life; you'll never be a *regular* actress. You'll"—and, forgetting her sex, gave her a tremendous slap on the back—"die young, the only one of your breed." He turned to his assistant. "Do you think I can ever get anybody to *believe* that?"

His assistant shook his head solemnly.

III

THEN the deluge began, the prophecy of Phillips was fulfilled. In hordes and swarms they came; idle young polo-players and club loungers; even wealthier older men, tired sensualists who searched for new sensations; prosperous artists and illustrators who thought to escape the stigma of "Johnnie" with the excuse of wanting to paint her—for no one protests more strongly against the appellation than the real "Johns" themselves; the amateur Bohemians of the Charles Lester Linthicum and Chisholm Cantilevel sort—novelists, story-writers, editors, impractical playwrights: who gave "artistic" dinners and suppers in dim candle-lit studios and who forever sought to convince pretty actresses that their varying professions had spiritual kinship, claiming to find all sorts of hidden mysticisms, messages and meanings in perfectly patent stage

trickery; the pet poets and philosophers of society, who, while seeking to identify fame and beauty with some "cause," are, incidentally, indecently erotic, amorous in the divine name of something-or-other; the parlor Anarchists and drawing room Socialists; the frankly admiring college boys and adolescents in general who are grateful for a few kind words and permission to spend their monthly allowances in a single night; and, finally, the Tired Business Man who has no conversation and no *chic* but much more money than any of the others, and who, with no time to study and understand the art of pleasing women, is as grateful as the adolescents if allowed to do the one thing at which he shines—which is to spend money in large quantities: a class that dares propose to radiant women nothing but marriage, their name, besides their money, being all they have to give.

To the last class belonged Peter Perine, Junior; to the second, the wealthy middle-aged sensualist, John Bulkington, 3d; and of their own and all the other classes who sought her, these two were the only ones that came to know Violet Vandam with any degree of intimacy; for Violet, now her chance had come, terrified lest she should prove unworthy of it, met no one until she had heard from Phillips; receiving expensive floral and saccharine tributes, jewelry and invitations all with apathy. And, when she got his letter, she eliminated from the running, without even meeting them, all gay young men, artists and other amateur Bohemians, parlor poets and philosophers, college boys, youths in general; all save serious-minded wealthy persons.

"Don't think you can take presents promiscuously and be seen in restaurants with a different man each night, without getting a cheap, common reputation," her mentor wrote from Hot Springs. "Any woman who sells her conversation and her company for taxicabs, suppers and champagne, who listens to conversations with double meanings and, finally, to down-

right smutty talk, might just as well go the limit. Her escorts *boast anyhow*—it being the nature of such brutes to be afraid to confess failure for fear other men have succeeded and will give them the horse laugh. Anyhow, if a woman's mind is unclean, her body doesn't matter: the mind, the brain, the soul, call it what you like, lives a few thousand or a few million years, maybe forever; the body about sixty or seventy: if the mind learns to be clean, the body soon follows suit—as in your own case. But when the mind gets diseased—good-night!

“But, to get down to the practical business of life, you're looking for a settlement: enough money to make you independent of men for life; so don't make any mistakes. Marriage doesn't much matter except as a proof of the man's seriousness: in fact, you're better off *unmarried* if you get a settlement just the same; because it's highly improbable you're going to meet the rich man you can love—money seems to ruin them as companions somehow—and you don't want him holding on by that legal tie when you need your freedom to enjoy his contribution. However, it's just as well to get him to *ask* you to marry him and then tell him, sadly, that a foolish childish marriage of yours still prevents the perfection of your maturer love being realized. If you are *really clever*, you should be able to get the money on his mere hope of marrying you when you have managed to find the mythical wandering husband and divorced him—I'll play the part by mail if you like; and I'm better than a raw hand at anything pertaining to larceny. . . .”

If she could have seen him as he wrote a portion of that letter—when he winced over an ugly thought and hastened to spur her on to “cleverness” as a means of avoiding its realization—Violet Vandam might have felt less sick at heart, might have believed that, after all, he was not unconcerned over the thought of her becoming another man's property as his coldly

casual advice seemed to imply. But, next morning, she considered that, as yet, Phillips knew her only as the tawdry Cinderella to whom he had played godmother. When he saw her on the stage . . . when he heard her speak of men and things as his books had taught her, when she took him to dine in her own country home amid surroundings that proved a chaste and informed taste . . .

That home, those surroundings: she did not have them yet. She must hasten, do what must be done, however disagreeable. . . . She turned to her mail, tossing most of it into the wastebasket, finally, pausing over the name of "John Bulkington 3d"—Peter Perine, Junior, having yet to be heard from. Bulkington's note of discreet admiration, accompanying a rare and expensive Vampire study—"Dracula"—which now hung in the theater lobby—she answered in her best slanted handwriting—an affectation she had learned from a convent-girl friend—expressing gratification that one so well known as a connoisseur of the arts should have found her humble efforts pleasing; but—chiefly—informing him that she never dined or supped in restaurants alone even with one so justly famed; but would he drop in for a cup of tea and let her thank him in person for a wonderful inspiring gift? Which was just the sort of letter to impress Mr. Bulkington.

IV

THUS Violet became known to awe-inspired adventurers as "the girl who threw Bulkington down"; again, despite appearances, proving that Miss Fortune was still "on the job," directing her triumphal progress. Violet had not meant so to treat Mr. Bulkington: who had erected a theater for one young woman he fancied, inscribing her in some new comic History of New York by identifying her name with the

building; also, for the same lady, a treasure-house just off the Park—on the “right” side, too, amid a flustered and protesting aristocracy, a villa at Nice and a Long Island château, the latter brought piece by piece from Normandy. She had been the only one he took seriously until he met Violet; but even his casual affairs had been marked by a Lucullan liberality, had established for life young women of mediocre talents. All this Violet knew and urged upon herself repeatedly: no more strife or struggle, all the good things of life forever after: it would not have seemed a hard bargain for one who, only a few years earlier, had given herself carelessly to a haberdashery clerk and to a bounder in gay tweeds: afterward taking her body into the cheapest market.

But it was as Phillips had written: when the mind is clean, the body must be; and a girl cannot worship a star unceasingly for any long space and then see the things of earth with the same eyes. Something had awakened in Cinderella that night, outcast as she was, emerging from an opium den to spend the night with a stranger she had known only two hours—and he a thief!—something, nevertheless, fine and clean. Her affair with Jim Healey had been the outcome of starvation for a little happiness—her life had contained none of the innocent joys of youth. She had gone from a strict Calvinistic home and daily drudgery to the little liberty that her tired body could take after ten hours of work each day: a body, moreover, unnourished by good food or fresh air or healthful exercise; her mind one that swung like a pendulum between stern dark belief in hell’s eternal fire, and its concomitant, that God could be cheated if the world did not find out. Her affair with the tweed-clad bounder was a choice between two evils: a return to hunger and loneliness or another yielding of herself—and, as she still believed, then, that if one had once taken his feet from the narrow path, damnation was sure—why not? Which also explains her position in the

market-place. Had Phillips not met her, she would have learned to drink to drown her fear of that certain damnation, and would have fallen, by rapid stages, to Fourteenth Street, the Bowery, Chinatown and the morgue.

But she hardly knew Cinderella now except to wonder at her. No doubt Phillips could have done nothing with her, his words and money pitifully wasted, had not she, in that night of careless caresses, lost all feeling of sin, for, though she had given her body before, it was the first time she had given herself. And so a white flame had been lighted—the flame of knowledge; that since had fed on all that was best in poets and philosophers; and, now, she looked upon the world with eyes of understanding. So looking upon Mr. Bulkington, seeing his heavy body shake with ill-concealed and ugly passion, no saurian with foul musky breath could have more affrighted and repelled her. He had bided his time like a gentleman: had made no bargain, had lavished on her unusual gifts of marbles, paintings, tapestries, hangings—any of which would have done justice to a museum: had placed at her disposal his most expensive town car, was only too delighted to discover oddly shaped or curiously set jewelry which would fitly adorn her—even made decent the fact that he bought her clothes, by urging upon her it was a pleasure to be allowed to gratify his bizarre theories concerning women's raiment: so that nowadays she looked like a Byzantine princess, setting a style that was the despair of modistes and of women who did not have her unusual hair and coloring, her tall, slender figure, nor the advantage of a designer who was called a "master financier." Undoubtedly, Bulkington had a deep and devout art sense that might have saved him, had his father not insisted on his following a business the third Bulkington hated.

"You'll give up a wonderful future?" he asked in incredulous amazement, when she repulsed him, with finality.

"Why, I'll make you the best-known actress in America. These theater and producing managers—bah!" He snapped his fingers. "Why, I or my associates own most of their theaters, *back* half their shows, can break the biggest of them—like that! This theater game isn't worth a big man bothering about, so we let the little fellows run it—but I'll step in and take enough to make *you* famous. You know what I did for Yvonne Maxfield? I'll do *more* for you!"

He was wise enough to make no passionate appeal: he had a sense of humor and knew how ridiculous such must seem from a man of his girth and gout; but he stated plainly a proposition it seemed no woman in her senses would refuse. Nevertheless, Violet, with averted face that she might not see the ugly picture of him in amorous guise, *did* refuse; and he went his way, raging, then wondering, finally respecting. He was too big a man, unscrupulous buccaneer though he was, not to recognize the bigness in others; and, unlike the small and despicable sort, could afford to acknowledge defeat. It was preferable to keeping silent about such an unusual character as Violet.

"To think," he told several of his confidants, repeating his incredible discomfiture in full, "to think of turning *me* down!" Such a story spread rapidly through the clubs. Almost nightly at the Garden, Violet's entrance was heralded by a hush: out of which, at her appearance, came whispers from groups of well-groomed Avenue *mondaines*, men and women alike. ". . . The girl who turned old Bulkington down."

In one of those groups one night was Peter Perine, Junior, whose father owned the biggest department store in the city: who, himself, unlike most rich men's sons, was a hard-working member of the Exchange; a great "catch": *débutantes* put on their prettiest frocks for him, but he was too busy to notice. His adventures had been confined to intrigues with

women on public sale: intrigues for which he paid bitterly in remorse, his ideals of "true womanhood" remaining unchanged. Of the stage he knew nothing: he had not even supped with a chorus girl; so, when he saw Violet and heard of her amazing chastity, there were no ugly reminders of others of her class to interfere with his dreams.

"Imagine: how many girls, even of *our kind*, would have refused?" he heard one of the women of his party saying. It disgusted him to hear such "cynical" talk: and from women with every advantage of birth, breeding, education and luxury, too. How different that brave little heroine back there, working hard for a living, engaged in a performance that must outrage her delicate sense of virtue! He hated the Vampire Dance; hated the thought that, nightly, this shrinking girl must expose her beautiful body to evil-minded men. He did not realize that he, himself, was capable of only the grossest passions: that, when married to this girl, his amours would in no way differ from those vulgar ones of the past; but the pill of vice would be coated with the sugar of respectability, so that he could run riot with his conscience's full approval. Had there been less of Violet's milk-white legs and body exposed, his "great love" might not have surged so hotly to his brain; but, of course, vulgar desire was not in keeping with thoughts of the girl who had "thrown down Bulkington": so it must be that purest of passions, love. Such is always the way of the Puritan: those shamefaced men who prowl the streets late at night, accosting street women in husky, strained voices, are always those who raise loudest their squeals against women's immorality; who speak bitterly of shattered ideals if their wives or sweethearts betray human failings . . .

So Peter Perine, Junior, would loftily tell himself of Violet: "*I don't think of her in that way at all*"; until he had wooed her with respectful admiration, adored her as some Saint Cecilia, declared he was not fit to marry her, and then

proved it, after marriage. But he could awake each morning with a pleasant sense of virtue to carry his conscience through the day, and it would all be highly right and proper because she would have worn orange blossoms and have been breathed over by the voice of a respectable and snakeless Eden.

V

HE asked her to marry him just two months later, after a courtship that included every possible present the ingenuity of man could conceive. She had permitted his caresses, his near-presence: had used all her ability as an actress to convince him that he would have been just as successful had he been penniless; and, then, next day, after having permitted nothing to interfere with his dream of eternal (but respectable) license, she talked to him calmly and sanely. She could not abandon her economic independence even for love—a useful phrase from a book recently read. If he wanted her to give up the stage, he must make her independence otherwise possible: she could not daily ask him for money: such marriages were degrading. And “if love grew cold,” he would not wish her to remain with him just for the sake of having her expenses paid, or else have a long and vulgar legal wrangle about how much alimony should be awarded, would he? Therefore . . . wasn't there such a thing as a marriage settlement? He leaped up, protesting he had been a brute not to suggest it himself; and, soon after, papers were made official and important by signatures and red tape, and the last stage of Phillip's prophecy was reached: she was a woman of independent fortune, and still unmarried.

But she meant to pay: the marriage would have taken place. Phillips, when informed of Perine's advent, had poured pails of water over her flame: the star had hidden itself in

dark heavens; the vision would be ever unrealized: for Phillips had advised, calmly and practically, that such a marriage was ideal: that she was a very lucky girl: that he could not imagine why she hesitated; and so, she saw at last, there was no stray hope for her: she had been only an interesting experiment to him: his advice and letters but evidences of a scientist's interest in an insect in a test tube. That letter had decided her: it was the last she ever received from him; but his final message was a telegram that came on the day her settlement had been arranged—came while Perine was waiting in her little drawing-room and she was standing before the mirror in her bedroom, fastening a rubber corset over a silk shirt and gazing at her mirrored charms in dull apathy: what did they matter now, or how long she kept her tiresome fiancé waiting for their drive?

But the telegram changed all that. Perine had never seen her so alluringly beautiful as, with silky hair loose over her shoulders, and in a cherry-colored kimono held together with one hand, she stretched out the scrap of paper. It read, briefly:

Am in the Tombs charged with conspiracy to defraud; penalty not less than seven years. Bail not allowed. Perine can square things for me. Will you ask him?

PHILLIPS.

Curiously enough, no outside opinions can change a woman's love, no incidents unconnected with her, affect it: a fact that makes ridiculous those plays and novels in which the heroine crying: "My God—you a thief?" ("forger" or "murderer" to suit) drives her lover forth forever. So Phillips, self-confessed criminal and possible convict, was still the great man of Violet's vision, just as desirable, just as dearly loved. It did not occur to her that Perine might not care to have a brother-in-law who was a criminal. The "no bail"

phrase frightened her, and, with no thought of herself, she took the surest way to make Perine exert all his influence.

"My brother," she sobbed as he read: "my brother. I'll die if he's sent away. You can fix it: he says so here. Hurry, hurry, hurry: get him out—hurry!" She almost pushed him from the room before he could get such a necessary detail as her "brother's" full name . . .

VI

PHILLIPS had been right: Perine *could* "square" it: a man as rich as Perine—representing the allied Perine interests, can "square" anything in New York. He went directly to the "Old Man" on Fourteenth Street, who, from time to time, arranged certain matters of legislation in favor of the "big interests"; and the "Old Man" visited the Chief of Police, who was only a vice-regent (in a double sense), the "Old Man's" deputy. Whereupon orders were issued to the "Front Office" to forget any record Phillips might have: he hadn't been "mugged" or measured, had he? That was enough—he was a respectable citizen unjustly suspected! So the victim of Phillips's wireless wire-tapping was visited by a "front-office dick" and informed that, as he had engaged with Phillips in a scheme to defraud the bookmakers, he, too, must stand trial for conspiracy, otherwise Phillips could not be indicted—this being the old law, recently revised. Moreover, if the judge happened to be in a nasty mood, he (the victim) might also be sentenced. He had best see the Assistant District Attorney in charge of the case; who, being another appointee by grace of Fourteenth Street and looking for future preferment, told the victim that, besides running a chance of imprisonment, he would be unlikely to get back his money; whereas it had been hinted if the case were withdrawn, the

accused would disgorge. . . . So, soon, there was only the duty of the State to prosecute; but *that* terminated in an apology to the prisoner for false imprisonment and the information from the judge—who played pinochle with the “Old Man”—that he had a suit against his defamer.

The clerk called the name as “Franklin Phillips, Esquire”; the Judge addressed him throughout as “Mr. Phillips”; while, the next moment, he was severely chastising with words one who had stolen several pounds of brass from a railroad, sentencing so horrible an offender against property to the limit of the law. . . . Phillips was not surprised at the newborn respect of the judiciary and constabulary: he was a rich man’s friend.

But two days later he shuddered to think what would happen if he ever fell into the hands of “justice” again; for, on that date, he stepped out of the famous Little Church where a rector detained from dinner had gabbled a marriage ceremony while pulling on his cassock, making Violet Vandam—who confessed her name actually to be Mary Jones—Mrs. Frank White, which was as near to Franklin Phillips as he had been christened. He had been too weak, too broken, in his cell, to keep up his pose longer: had admitted he had gone on the principle, with her, that it was useless to make her decent and successful only to marry her to a crook. . . .

“But you don’t *have* to be a crook, dearest,” she sobbed, holding him tight: “I have lots of money now—and I *need* you. I’ve got some *reputation*, but really I’m *nobody*. You can have a chance to use your brains—to put on a real show, make an actress out of me—a real actress. It won’t be living on *my* money—I *knew* you’d say that; it’ll be *hard work*. Oh, Phillips, *please!*”

She was very sorry for Perine: she *was*, *really*; but—she argued—his was the misfortune of war. Was *she* to be unhappy? Anyhow, it was all his father’s fault—Peter Perine,

Senior's; didn't he own the department store where she had been underpaid; and if her wages had been decent, wouldn't she be there still, instead of being forced into degradation—though, afterward, luckily, uplifted! What if she did owe Perine something—she owed Phillips more; and what had Perine given her anyhow except money that had come from underpaying just such girls as she? . . . Yes, let him go quarrel with his father, not with her. And, so, easily, she salved her conscience, leaving, however, for Europe lest Perine prove unreasonable; all of which may account, partly, for the Socialist papers, nowadays, calling Perine the most brutal of all oppressors of the poor.

You may see Franklin Phillips on Broadway any day and mistake him for a well-dressed Englishman. He has an office near Forty-second Street, where he plans the productions of plays by Ibsen, Strindberg, Hauptmann and Wedekind, with fliers into farce to provide the money for them, and an occasional Shakesperean production for his wife, the well known "star." Each night, he motors out to their Westchester farm. "*Broadway*," he said to me the other day, "*Broadway*: I hate it. The rottenest *morals* . . ."

II. THE FRONT-ROW GIRL

I

ALICE AMES remembers the time when Daisy Deliria was annoyed if less than six hansoms were waiting for her after the performance. To have a dressing-room that was a bower of expensive hothouse flowers was a commonplace; and it was unnecessary for anyone in the company to buy candy—there was always a five-pound box open in Daisy's room, generally attached to it the card of some man who had been "put up" for the best clubs during infancy. The flowers often obscured totally the many black-and-white and wash drawings of Daisy that had appeared in magazines and other periodicals; and there was an excellent copy in oils of "Cleopatra," by Cahusac Deljian, R. A., for which Daisy had posed in London while she was a member of "The Belle of New York." On a shelf were the works of many of the younger novelists, the flyleaf of each inscribed with Daisy's name and the author's signature. Her dressing-table was covered with the signed photographs of well-known people in expensive frames: actors, managers, millionaires, playwrights; concomitants of twenty-two-karat buttonhooks, brushes and bottle tops and a "shaker," especially designed by a peer's goldsmith to accommodate her favorite tooth-powder.

A silken Samarcand was on the floor, and "art" paper on the walls. The room looked more like a society leader's than a chorus girl's; and, if you had seen Daisy serving tea from

her Russian samovar between matinée and night performances, had observed the top hats, sticks and white Italian gloves held in left hands while their twins juggled cups, saucers and lettuce sandwiches, you would have found it hard to believe that you were in a theater; and, if truly you were, in none less than Miss Barrymore's room. Yet in 1900, Daisy Deliria, despite four years' trouping, was still an almost lineless lady of the front row, although her stage gowns were designed by one of our foremost artists and specially executed in Paris by Paul Poiret.

Alice shared Daisy's room; although, had Daisy been other than the famous Deliria, it would have been more orthodox to say that Daisy shared Alice's; for Alice was a "principal," the soubrette of the Music Hall. But the management would have dispensed with their prima donna rather than Daisy. Daisy was musical comedy incarnate. She attracted the sort of patrons who pay for nightly front-row seats whether they use them or not; who give box parties and like to be noticed from the stage: the young and young-old males of Wall Street and Money Avenue; artists and writers, too (as you have seen), who give free advertisements in costly magazines, advertisements no money could buy.

Daisy Deliria was that *ornithorynchus-paradoxus*, the pure chorus girl. Daisy separately told more than two hundred enamored swains that she was waiting for the man she could love "with all her heart" and that he was not the one. She might have had a house in Central Park West or in London's Mayfair; motors, liveried servants, a sea-going yacht, the distaff part of a peerage. Of the two hundred, anyone who was worth less than a million had a name that was international; at least seventy-five of them proposed marriage and as many more would have done so had they been free of ties. The others offered many worldly inducements; a princely settlement paid through an attorney was the favorite. These

latter Daisy at first demanded should never show her their faces again. When she became more accustomed to the viewpoints of Messrs. Worldly-Wisemen she only laughed and spoke mordantly of better men whose *honorable* proposals she had declined.

So she had spoken to Linlithgow Bruce; but the comparison had served her ill for once, though it might have served her well; for to him she owes the best advice ever given her. Had she followed it, this story might not be worth telling.

"You are keeping yourself for God's good man?" he asked, with a faint sneer. "Well, keep going on as you do, and you'll get fewer proposals such as you say Lord Earlington's was and more like mine. If you're a good girl waiting for undying love and eugenic children, you'd better shake cocktails, champagne and all-night restaurants."

"I can take care of myself," she responded coldly.

"You persist in misunderstanding." Bruce reached for his hat. "Physical purity is valuable only as a result of mental purity; otherwise, it's only selfishness or cowardice. And selfish or cowardly moralists are less admired by real people than those who sin courageously according to convictions. D'you understand?"

"If you think you can talk me into being a bad girl, you're mistaken," said Daisy virtuously.

Linlithgow, who was now at the door, smiled.

"To tell the truth, I have lost all personal interest in you, Daisy," said he. "There are two classes of people I admire: one is born with instinctive knowledge and good taste; the other has its feet set toward the palace of wisdom even if, as Blake says, the way lies over the road of excess. I thought you were one of the latter; and I am enough of a Greek to desire closer companionship with you to bring your mind to the same state of perfection as your face and body. One can do that with the lower class, but seldom with the middle class.

The middle classes are idol-worshippers; and Respectability and What the World Thinks are their idols, each demanding daily toil of human lives."

He took a step toward her, speaking seriously. He was sorry for her.

"Marry somebody, if it's only the stage fireman—marry! Marriage is the only safe thing for girls like you."

II

ALICE AMES often shared the reflected glory of Daisy's conquests, Daisy insisting that her chum should be invited to her own triumphal feasts. But Alice was not popular with Daisy's admirers. She was a silent little person, too conscious of her lack of breeding and education to converse freely in the presence of men whom, often, she caught exchanging sly grins when other girls mistook homonyms for synonyms or perfect participles for past tenses. Alice came from the same lower-middle-class folk as Daisy, and had fought her way upward with more difficulty, having only brains and a singing voice instead of Daisy's surpassing loveliness. Alice's complexion lacked the Deliria peach-blossom effect; both her face and her thin body betrayed one whose ancestors had been insufficiently nourished; although painters knew that when good living finally overcame this, Alice's gentian-blue eyes would inspire rapture: they knew, too, that her low, broad forehead was one that Praxiteles would have been eager to reproduce in marble. Possessing that shyness which is allied with appreciation of superior things, Alice could never believe she knew much about either singing or dancing, and consequently worked so hard at rehearsal as to earn even the admiration of that great producer, Bob Ledyard.

"Miss Ames is one in a thousand," Bob had said when

recommending her for her present position. "You don't have to tell her anything more than once—in which she differs from ninety-nine actresses in a hundred."

Therefore it annoyed Bob Ledyard when, some weeks later, rehearsals being called for a new burlesque to be interpolated, Alice's place was taken by a pretty, brainless girl of the usual soubrette type. Daisy informed him that Alice had decided to "study"—had spoken of some unexpected legacy when Daisy visited her in her new rooms in Washington Square. The "studying" puzzled Daisy. Where were the dancing-masters and singing-teachers? What was the use of an actress taking up English literature and economics? Daisy refused all urgings to do likewise, returning with righteous wrath some books Alice loaned her.

"I'd never let a man know I read such things," she said; "and I'd never let any man I cared for read 'em. Why, they've got no respect for women at all, those writers. Anybody 'ud think we were just like animals."

"So we are," responded Alice, "women more than men. Men have developed their minds, their spiritual side. We haven't."

"Men are a hundred times more animals than we are," Daisy responded angrily. "I guess you don't know men like I do."

"I don't try to appeal to their animal sense like you do, that's why," her friend replied.

This speech was the beginning of a breach that never healed. Explanations, intended to abate Daisy's rage, only made matters worse.

"You don't understand, dear," Alice conceded hastily. "But just consider. The minute *you* meet a man what results? A flirtation. What's a flirtation? An appeal to his animal sense, isn't it? Lowering your eyelashes, letting him hold your hand, speeches that lead him on—"

"I never led a man on in my life," swore Daisy.

"Just *so far*," Alice again conceded. "But why let him go any distance if you intend to stop him? When girls make a business of men, when they do it to get clothes and food and a place to live, I don't say anything except that I'm sorry that's the best they can do. But *you* do it for fun: to feel flattered, to feel you're fascinating."

Daisy drew her lips down.

"You'd do the same if you had my chances," she said with cruel deliberation.

"I know you're prettier than I am," returned Alice, flushing. "Still, I've had plenty of chances, too. But I talk about things to get their minds *away* from flirtation. I try to make a 'pal' of a man if I like him, so *I've* got lots of men friends. *You've* only got sweethearts and enemies. They begin by loving you and end by hating you—and it's your fault."

"It's not. It's their own beastliness," almost screamed Daisy.

"It's not," returned Alice, just as angry now. "Some men *are* beasts. But if the others treat you that way, it's because you can't do anything *but* flirt; because you won't read, won't study, won't learn what's worth talking about. That's why your good looks are going to be your curse; see if they're not! If you won't try to get anything to replace them, for heaven's sake stop dissipating and doing the things that will make you lose them, or in ten years you'll be down and out."

Daisy took herself off in such a temper that she could not even choke out a formal good-bye; and the anger lasted long. While it endured she learned something that gave her a good excuse for not visiting Alice again. "And so she's Miss Prude, is she—preaching at me whom nobody can say *that* against! She and that scoundrel of a 'Linny' Bruce!"

It was nearly seven years before she saw Alice again: years that brought many changes to them both; during which she never ceased to denounce her quondam chum as a hypocrite

and false friend, the latter because of the growing rumor that linked her name with that of Linlithgow Bruce. So, when she celebrated too freely, Daisy often would recite an imaginary but pathetic charge that, gradually, she had grown to believe: that Alice had robbed her of a husband.

III

YES, Daisy drank. One cannot sit night after night in cafés where champagne flows without promoting that drink from luxury to necessity. After retiring at daybreak, one cannot rise before noon for rehearsals unless some stimulant forces a misused body into kinetic energy it does not possess. Daisy was receiving few offers of marriage now, her name having become too much of a synonym for the "gay life," her figure, draped and undraped, having been used too frequently by pink sporting sheets, to please the wife-hunters. The men of the hard-to-enter clubs had begun to regard her as homogeneous with the young lady who entertained them with "Apaches" and "Tangos" at their favorite cabaret; her they paid with money, Daisy with suppers, taxicabs and wine. A morning telephone call to Daisy insured a satisfactory crew of female companions at the supper-table. Was a pretty face noticed in the chorus, Daisy was 'phoned to to arrange for the pretty face's presence at a private supper-party. There was hardly a male member of the "sporty set" that Daisy could not address by the same familiar nicknames they bore among their polo-playing *confrérie*. In return she was "good old Daisy," or "old girl." She had not resented the "old" at first; such people called everybody 'old' man, "old" boy, "old top." But one night it suddenly struck her with a sinister significance.

A splendid supper had been served in a Louis XIV room.

"Baby" Webster was being wooed ardently by a young English viscount; Jean Hortense was looking soulfully into the eyes of a millionaire's sole heir; Letty Lee was playing her game with a wealthy young Jew, pretending to be impressed by his masterful ways. Every possible corner of the large, dimly lit room was in service for couples playing the eternal game; while she, Daisy Deliria, most beautiful and celebrated of all, sat at the table attentionless. Dozing nearby was the cynical host, a wealthy idler who gave such suppers automatically, since it was part of the life he had selected in youth and which had so sapped his energies that he was unable to change it in age, though it now bored him intensely.

"Looks like we're out of it, old girl," he said, awaking at some burst of merriment wilder than usual. He spoke solely from politeness, for silences were not etiquette at gay supper-parties: somebody might start thinking.

She winced.

"D'you remember that supper I gave at Curate's five years ago?" he went on drowsily. "How I chased you into a corner and wouldn't let you out until you kissed me?"

"I didn't, though," she said with spirit.

"We didn't understand you then, Daisy," said he, and dozed again, leaving Daisy to ponder over his explanation.

They understood her *now*. It was a bold man who would make overtures to the man-scorning Deliria, who had learned to jest at impropriety of speech and to make the speaker feel ridiculous; and she was beginning to understand what we have stated: that the marrying men, having formed too bacchanalian a view of her character, sought "squabs," "chickens," if they wanted theatrical brides, not the girl whose picture a thousand barbers had cut from their illustrated weekly and used as a mural decoration, whose fleshing limbs were as familiar as her face to readers of ten-cent magazines.

Daisy's conduct from the night just chronicled was due to an instinctive knowledge that she needed new attractions. Had she applied cold reason to instinct, the tactics would have been just as new but of a different sort; reasoning, at this point, might have saved Daisy from her ruin. The truth was that, having discounted her physical lure, she must endeavor to attract by mentality. To do this, she must train her mind as Alice had advised years since.

But Daisy was only instinctive. And instinct, long subjected to false brakes, misled her. Realizing her need, she reached swiftly for what was near to hand. She began to pose as a wit.

The kind of wit Daisy affected was popular in England when all shallowpates went about, as somebody says, with one deadly epigram, waiting for some indecency in the conversation to plant it, as bees conserve their one deadly sting; an imitation of the moribund "Yellow Book" formula, without its "form." One has only to be alert to be expert at such wit; to pounce upon and distort any unintentional ambiguity in careless conversation. Daisy congratulated herself when she found men again paid her conversational attention. Young fellows meeting her for the first time grinned in expectancy and told her they had heard of her cleverness. In the struggle to maintain this reputation, she soon was guilty of verbal indiscretions that shocked her. But she could not go back. Soon she was reading privately printed books, pornographic verse. She wrote some of the latter herself, to recite at parties; and some stray bits were printed by a Cayenne-Tabasco weekly. Her reputation rose—and fell.

That is, her personal attraction fell. Even boys did not make offers of marriage now; she was no longer forced to frown coldly upon their elders for the habit of suggesting that they be her bankers. Once they heard her *ripôstes* and read her verse, even cynical roués decided they wanted minds

more innocent to move them to affection. Men do not desire women to tell smoking-room stories; at their worst, they only wish them to listen. Nor, in spite of their oft expressed liking for "jolly good fellows," do they like to see women drink. A glass or two of champagne, a cocktail before dinner, a liqueur after, those they permit; but when a woman refills her glass greedily, men mentally shrug their shoulders.

But the habit had grown upon Daisy, particularly since the beginning of her reputation as a wit. To have a continual overflow of sparkling conversation (even when the sparkle is brummagem) necessitates either exciting circumstances or, else, stimulants. The circumstances, alas, had been lacking long since for Daisy.

At this stage her former admirers telephoned her less frequently.

She began to have unengaged evenings. They frightened her. She was accustomed to having her waning self-confidence restored by obsequious people: chauffeurs who bowed and scraped, knowing she would make it a point with her escorts to see they were "kept"; head-waiters who greeted her as royalty, since she was the sort of person who always called for "special" things which would necessitate their consultation and remuneration; cloak-room attendants who knew, if they flattered her by inferring that she was too famous to need a check to identify her wraps, that she would ask her friends to give them some lagnappe worth while. If she went merely to powder her nose, she carried a dollar donation, since the sort of men with which she consorted did not feel comfortable handing such a girl silver. And the orchestra leader never played her favorite airs until she requested it; for her request complied with meant that somebody would toss him something more than the ordinary bill. All these people, secure in the largesse her attendance involved, allowed her, unrebuked, the airs of a grand duchess.

One restaurant after another, and so on until morning; and every night for years: that was her life. She could not give it up. And as it was a life that must be lived at somebody's expense, she condescended to accompany *declassé* choristers and their college boys.

Soon she was seeing more students and less and less of her former friends of the Racquet and University clubs; finally, students only. Yale and Princeton Saturday nighters, most of whom had possessed "den" pictures of her for years, spread the glad news of finally achieving a personal acquaintance with their divinity. Wholesale introductions followed. Except that few of these boys had allowances that permitted them to be regular patrons of the all-night restaurants where champagne was the customary order, it was like a renewal of her pristine triumphs. As for champagne, Daisy's desire had never been for its taste but for its effect; therefore less expensive liquors served as well—in fact, better, for she could purchase them herself, facing the necessity which grew more frequent of mornings.

IV

WHEN the old Music Hall fell behind the times and finally closed, Daisy remained without a situation for many months. Managers, devoid of "old times" sentiment, appraised her thickening figure and threatened double chin at much less than those who had formerly profited through her. Even then she did not see the writing on the wall, though her college-boy friends were going the way the Racquet Club men had gone—but for a different reason. Such boys like to sit in front row seats and carry on pantomime conversations with their friends while on the stage, advertising to those seated nearby that they are sad young dogs; later, at the stage

door, to bear off casually these comedy queens before the longing eyes of gallery boys and rival collegians. They did not relish exchanging these triumphs for an expensive and unadvertised taxicab trip to a dingy Harlem apartment-house section. Standing under a gasolier covered with tissue paper, surrounded by other such supposed improvements, in a Harlem home of tasteless respectability, her caller was apt to note that her eyes and complexion were losing their brilliancy and that her costume did not heighten any remaining charms. Daisy had never been careful of her clothes—beauties do not feel the necessity; and she had never had much money to spend on them, since her wages largely supported her mother's home.

Under such circumstances, such an escort was apt to resent expensive orders of food or drink, the results not justifying the expenditure; and if he submitted to her requisitioning a taxi when they might have walked two or three blocks in less time, it was only once and that sullenly. As for having taxis "kept," that day was past. When she suggested it, she received cold stares of dislike.

Out of work three months, she was reduced to telephoning instead of being telephoned; after four months, she was forced to hunt up girl friends and go to Curate's for tea in the hope of being able to entrap former acquaintances into dinner and supper invitations, a habit soon detected by the wary Broadway birds who kept out of gunshot after a few of their number had been bagged.

"Daisy Deliria's trying to catch your eye, Ralph," said one "leading man" to another, both her ardent admirers in days gone by.

"Thanks for the warning," said Ralph, incontinently departing. The other leading man, as yet without Ralph's experience, served as his substitute; and when later he dismissed

a taxicab at Daisy's home, he borrowed carfare from the chauffeur to ride back to the club on the "L."

In her happier days, Ralph's friend would have whistled happily on his "L"-ward journey and boasted at the club of having been allowed to go broke in Daisy Deliria's service.

In face of such attitudes, Daisy was visited by the subconscious realization that employment was necessary to make new friends or even retain old ones. After fruitlessly making many rounds, she found one of her former stage-managers with an "angel" and careless of expense.

"But I can't afford to pay you your salary unless you do a part, Daisy," he said. "The show-girl's day is over. I only use ten, and I can get all I want for eighteen per. We've done everything that can be done with lineless languid ladies. Can you play a part?"

"Sure," said Daisy desperately.

But Daisy couldn't. Bob Ledyard gave her his patient best and much time that he could ill afford to spare from his dancing girls. Finally, in despair, he called upon the librettist and commanded him to write a small part into a certain situation.

"You'll have to take it, Daisy," said Bob later when he thrust the supererogatory few lines into her hand.

"Thirty dollars a week?" she sobbed unbelievably.

"If it was anybody but you it would be the raspberry," said Bob, trying to be kind. "Can't you buck up, Daisy? You're losing your looks and your figure. Why don't you try to learn singing or dancing? If you will, I'll see that you get your old salary in my next show."

And, after a pause, for he realized he had asked an impossibility of such as the Deliria temperament:

"Why don't you get married, girlie? It's the best thing for you, really."

Her sobbing made him uncomfortable. He recalled the old

Music Hall days when he was a young producer and Daisy was a queen; remembered her kindness to less fortunate girls.

"There, there," he said hastily. "I put on ten shows a year, Daisy. I'll always see there's a 'bit' for you. You won't starve anyway. There, there . . ."

V

LINLITHGOW BRUCE and Alice Ames pushed through the crowd at the theater, hoping for a taxicab. Finding none, as they feared would be the case on New Year's Eve, they were caught in the Broadway crush, and, after Alice had suffered from the roughness of several rowdy revelers, Bruce pushed her through swinging doors into one of those second-class restaurants patronized by Brooklyn burgesses and Harlemites on the rampage, students and others of the sort only occasionally bacchanalian.

He sent word that the head-waiter should somewhere wedge in an extra table. Turning, he saw Alice standing rigidly, staring in horrific dismay.

"Linny! There's Daisy Deliria!" Bruce looked, and nodded, frowning.

"She *has* done for herself, hasn't she?" he said.

Daisy was seated a few paces from the door, at a wind-swept table she would have scorned in days when head-waiters respected her male companions. Her faded charms were evident: the swanlike contour of throat was lost in a double chin, and her Cleopatra eyes seemed stricken with amaurosis, they were so dull and lifeless.

"Linny," said Alice choking, "let's give her another chance—take her to Long Island to-morrow. A few months with us; clean country air, riding, games—"

"Bother, Alice," said Bruce. "She could have had all that. She likes this better."

"She's *got* to like it *now*. But she doesn't, now that she sees the finish of it, I know. She's learned her lesson—only nobody cares now."

"You'll have a tough job," said Bruce, surveying Daisy critically. "However, since it's winter and we're not likely to have many visitors, go ahead if your mind is set on it. But it's useless, my dear."

Alice crossed swiftly to Daisy's table. The body that had been thin was "slender," the formerly peaked face "spirituelle"—good food and right thinking make such metamorphoses; and the gentian-blue eyes and broad, low forehead thus provided with a fitting frame, Alice seemed beautiful and a patrician; an effect heightened by sable coat, Vienna costume and rope of pearls. Alice had schooled her eyes into an almost permanent look of well-bred toleration, a useful sort of look for public purposes; but the schooling was forgotten; her face expressing only a quick concern, half horror, half pity. Daisy, who had seen her from the first, though pretending not to, read the look aright, and her eyes seemed amaurotic no longer, but regained a flash of hatred for the girl she had once patronized. She tried to down her surging envy with scorn for the method by which the costly clothes had been procured, attributing in error all her former chum's new beauty and charm to them.

There were six boys at the table, none of age, none rich; six boys who had pooled their finances to purchase the costly wine that is compulsory on New Year's Eve, and had invited Daisy because she was the only girl of the kind they knew who did not have an engagement at the eleventh hour. The boys were tipsy, and having just discovered that the cooler yielded no further refreshment, were rallying Daisy on having infringed upon their shares.

"Order more, then," she said loudly for Alice to hear as she came up, a fatal piece of bravado that became a boom-erang.

"Order more! Who d'you think you're with? Those millionaire friends of yours you're always telling us about? Wonder they didn't send one of their ten-thousand-dollar cars for you to-night!"

Daisy had not turned, although she knew Alice was there. It maddened her that, at Alice's appearance, there should have come into the eyes of these college boys so complete a respect. They wore their Fifth Avenue look. They had a different sort for Broadway. Reminding them as she did of their sisters' friends from convent and boarding-school, girls to whom they would some day be engaged, the appearance of Alice sobered them like cold water.

The ashes of life were in Daisy's mouth, her wine of Dead Sea fruit. Was it for this she had kept "straight," that a smug fraud might gain more respect than she? No, swore Daisy, with a pious oath; she had paid with poverty for respect and respect she would have; no dressed-up minx should rob her of that for which she had sacrificed everything.

She contained herself grimly while Alice spoke.

"Daisy, I'm so glad to see you again. Come home with us, won't you, dear? I've so much to tell you. It's been years . . . We're at the Ritz to-night, but to-morrow we go back to Long Island, and we'll take you for a long, long rest. You need it, poor darling. Come. . . . Why—Daisy!"

Alice stepped back like one suddenly struck. Indeed, Daisy's forcible removal of her gentle grasp had been equivalent to a blow; and now she faced Alice wild-eyed, determined to strip off the impostor's mask. Precious little respect they'd have for Miss Alice Ames when *she* had her say! And then maybe they'd remember what was due a "good" woman.

"None of your impudence, Alice Ames!" she almost

screamed. "The nerve of you—to try the pitying act on me! Me that could have had 'Linny' Bruce and all your sables and pearls, too, if I wanted to sink to *your* level! Yes, and twenty times better men than he ever was. Better save your pity for somebody that needs it—yourself. The world's got a thousand times the respect for me it's got for you. These boys here 'ud rather be seen with my kind of a girl a thousand times better than your kind—"

Alice had found time to regain her poise. She knew that only from appearances could even the nearest revelers conclude matters were awry between them. In the pandemonium which had broken loose at the twelve o'clock whistle before she got to her feet, Daisy's violences were like whispers. Indeed, Alice had recognized the words of abuse only by the movements of Daisy's lips.

All gentleness had flown from Alice; she desired but to retreat in good order. The cool, detached poise, the amused tolerance, that was now habitual with her, had returned.

"They'd never have the *chance* to associate with *my* kind of girl, Daisy," she said, sweeping her with scornful eyes. Speechless with rage, unable adequately to retort, Daisy yet knew that she must efface that scorn. She reached for something to hurl at this smiling sinner; but her hand was caught and pinioned by a waiter captain, who having noted her fiery look when she rose, had moved nearer during her declamation.

The noise was still too general for any but those two to hear what he said; but Daisy would have rather all the others witnessed her humiliation than this one woman. For the waiter captain, after appraising the sables, the costume and the pearls, might have been Alice's own personal servant.

"She won't try anything like that again, madam," he said, referring to Daisy, whom he viewed sternly. "But, if you're a bit nervous about it, I'll make her leave the place this instant."

"A thousand times as much respect, Daisy?" Alice murmured, diabolically gentle. Immediately she was sorry. It was like striking a lame beggar; for at last Daisy had realized she was an Esau; that the price of her birthright was only pottage. Her look, as she sank into her seat, haunted Alice for many nights.

She put out her hands as a mother to a helpless, naughty child.

"Daisy dear, forgive me. I didn't mean it. Forgive me. Please come with me to Long Island. Please."

But Daisy neither spoke nor moved.

"Better leave her, madam," said the captain. "I'll look out for her if she's a friend of yours."

"But don't you know her, waiter, know who she is?" gasped Alice. Surely the man would not speak so if he knew.

He nodded. "Daisy Deliria? Oh, yes, madam. For years. We see them come and go, we waiters. Once"—he shrugged his shoulders—"I know. It's a hard thing to say, but we'd rather she wouldn't come here. She makes more complaints of service and gives more trouble for the small money that's spent than any fifty . . . Have your table ready in a moment, sir," he said to Bruce as he reached him.

"Lynn!" said Alice faintly.

"Get a taxi, no matter who ordered it first," said Linlithgow Bruce, alarmed at her look. "Here!"

"Thank you, sir," said the captain.

VI

DAISY had not opened her eyes when Alice and Bruce departed. The collegian who had spoken so rudely of her millionaire friends' absence now thrust a toy megaphone at her and observed admiringly that if she could persuade her

friend to join them they could endeavor to raise the price of another bottle; a further tribute to Alice that was a twist of the knife already in Daisy's vitals. Her silence annoyed her interlocutor, who with the others plotted some deviltry to cure her of her "sulks," a deviltry that might have eventuated but for the results produced by Daisy's second caller.

This one, a man, an insufferable toady and cad, who had annoyed every celebrity on the Nightless Lane by taking his given name in vain on provokingly brief acquaintance, came up as the din began to die down. It was his aim in life to pretend an intimate acquaintance with all well-known people, and, to carry this off successfully, collected gossip as Wall Street men collect money. Once he had boasted to others that he knew Daisy Deliria. Now he seldom troubled to speak to her; she was no longer worth his while. Daisy hardly remembered him.

"Was that Alice Bruce I saw standing at your table?"

She opened eyes that seemed again lifeless. "Who?" she asked dully.

"Alice Bruce. Funny her being here—just dropped in myself, making the rounds. Canary's or Monico's more *her* style. Still, people do go everywhere New Year's Eve, don't they? Like me, for instance, dropping in—"

"Alice *who*?"

"Didn't know she'd married Bruce? Eho, yaas—years ago. Somebody left her money and she went back to school. Bruce likes to do weird things, and they say she met him through some—what-d'you-call-it—sociological society."

The gossip winked; it was the sort of wink that caused self-respecting men to flee at his approach.

"Although they do say that money story is the bunk, and that he took her out of the old Music Hall himself. Not that *I* know. Clever girl, anyway; not a word about her stage career in the papers or anything. Even went to her home

town to get married . . . Why, what's the matter with the woman?"

Daisy had fainted.

VII

BOB LEDYARD always keeps his word. There is only one Bob, and managers expect a great man to have *some* idiosyncrasies. So Daisy has settled down to a steady minimum wage for playing "bits," although there is a movement on foot to make her a wardrobe woman next season. For she has lost her figure, and her voice is so hoarse that the few words she has to speak cannot be identified by auditors farther back than the fourth row—not that the words entrusted to her ever matter very much; Bob doesn't let sentiment spoil plays. Certain obscure publications sometimes pay her fifteen cents a line for her verses or five or ten dollars for her short stories. She has but a single string to her lyre; her song is always of the brutal men who "have no use for respectable girls," which, she explains, is why she is not riding in motor cars. But she manages to even respectability's score to her own satisfaction by having those other girls of her stories die in the midst of guilty splendor, or, if she lets them live, it is only that they may be afflicted with that sort of bathetic remorse once exemplified when a certain class of songs became popular by featuring birds in gilded cages and banquets in misery halls. You can see her any day at Curate's, paying for her own tea (with soda). If you should meet her, you will not escape her plaint:

" . . . No use for respectable girls . . . more lemon, waiter."

It is a curious word—respectability. Perhaps she speaks truly. But she alternates "respectable" with "good," evidently

under the impression that they are synonyms. The phrase "chemically pure" was invented for such as Daisy. Goodness, or to be less vague, virtue, is, as Bruce once told her, in the mind. And a woman who has it there does not find pleasure in such a life as Daisy has led.

It was not the life of a "good" girl, only that of one selfish and afraid. She wanted everything in exchange for nothing; and such people generally get nothing in exchange for everything.

III. WHEN THE PIPER OF HAMELIN PLAYED RAG-TIME

ADMITTEDLY, Gorsuch is the great American novelist. But did he become so by starving in a garret for the better part of his younger days? No. Had *he* been the "master of his fate, the captain of his soul," he would, probably, be writing hack musical comedies with one hand and gloomy imitations of Ibsen with the other.

A genealogical tree of Gorsuch's earlier series of achievements reads something like this:

From Connie Allerton (née Ogg), and Aylwin Allerton, was descended "The Devonshire Maid." From her descended Ida Dare, who was the ancestress of "When the Piper of Hamelin Played Rag-time" and of Darrell Darcy. And from these was descended "Love's Understudy," the first Gorsuch novel.

Perplexing? Not when you have heard the story. Gorsuch, who has the gift of analysis, tracked it to its lair, and told it one night, to prove to a critic drunken on Joseph Conrad, that God was a better stage-manager of the Universal Drama than young critics allow.

"The Universe is purposeless," said the young critic, "unnecessarily cruel, harsh, pitiless. Conrad has the right idea—"

"You mean Barnum," suggested Gorsuch, quoting a less searching mind.

"'Cruel and absurd contradictions,' Conrad says. . . . 'Pity, hope, charity, even reason perish. . . . Its object is purely spectacular.' That's what Conrad says."

"The great fault with these modern romantics is that they try to measure God with a tape-measure," said Gorsuch, yawning. "They deal in details and call them facts, in scenes and call them plays; worst of all they fail to see that a man does not stand alone, that he is only an actor in some little comedy or tragedy; and each of these is a scene in a perfectly constructed Universal Drama—which, following all known rules of synthesis, should be an act of the great Solar System play, which will be thoroughly explained in a program footnote so that you critics will not be too harsh at its final enactment on Judgment Day. Meanwhile, the trouble with most people is that they can't even see the construction of the primary scenes."

"Don't understand," said the Conrad enthusiast sulkily.

"Well—" Gorsuch looked about him, sleepily, for an example. "See here: a highly moral President, stainless private character but easily fooled by rich rascals, especially if they were vestrymen, is hoaxed into helping said rascals by declaring war with small country for commercial reasons; many lives are lost. Elected second time; on verge of doing other disastrous things for said rascals—quite honestly and unknowingly. Anarchist shoots him. Wail goes up from other honest people about injustice of Creator.

"Meanwhile, a clever, honest man is railroaded to the Vice-Presidency, his claws cut so as not to hurt said rascals. Anarchist thus inadvertently foils said rascals and puts into power clever honest man who begins fighting and has never stopped. If Anarchist had not shot honest, unknowing President, the rich rascals' grip on the country would have been unbreakable. As it is, people's eyes are opened; the rich rascals are defeated: one honest man is sacrificed to save millions. Fairly well-constructed piece of drama—what? Yet often used to show Divine lack of pity, hope, charity, and reason. Think it over. Good-night."

"But," objected the pessimist, albeit shakily. Gorsuch sighed. "Take my own case. Stupid little woman can't sing, dance or act—Connie Allerton—English. Another one, ditto—Ida Dare—American. Yet if both hadn't become famous, I'd never have met my wife, and if I hadn't, I couldn't have afforded to quit writing hack stuff and get down to realities. That's another well-constructed affair—"

"Let's hear it," said the disciple of Conrad in the tone of one willing to be convinced.

"It's already been told, all in one sentence," protested Gorsuch. "Whatever exists has been evil and will be good, or has been good and will be evil."

It would have been more interesting to hear the story in his own words. However, the facts are fairly well known and are as follows:

Because Aylwin Allerton was the librettist of the Frivolity Theater, his chorus-girl bride was given a part; and he worried out for her a song that needed no voice to carry it. You know the sort: something quite insultingly suggestive, but which when sung "innocently" by a wide-eyed ingénue, elicits shrieks from cynics aged sixteen or sixty. It made Connie celebrated; and, as her librettist-husband followed it with equally popular songs for her, she was soon sufficient of an advertising asset to have a piece especially written to suit her small capabilities—"The Devonshire Maid." It was exceptionally clever as musical shows go: and the American rights were purchased by Harlan K. Harney.

Having been written to feature "innocence," demureness, and simplicity, the play needed those qualities in its American protagonist, else the story, which told of unsophisticated *Amaryllis* walking blindfolded into the "temptations of a great city," became shrieking farce. Harlan K. Harney tried one or another of all the celebrated American comedy queens.

Their voices (their principal asset) were not particularly necessary to the part and their carefully-cultivated shrugging Parisienne, nasal New York, or lackadaisical London personalities were handicaps; so he dismissed them, knowing his play would fail if his *Devonshire Maid* showed no sign of being either a maiden, or—while he did not insist on Devon—from any 'shire at all.

Then, accidentally, he saw Ida Dare: "The Lord had his arm around her, sure," remarked her agent later when he pondered upon it. Mr. Harney had dropped into a vaudeville theater to pick up the manager there for the première of a new play over the way. Had he visited such a place for amusement, Mr. Harney would have come half an hour later, avoiding the opening acts—always the lowest priced and generally the worst. Miss Ida Dare, one of these, was giving a stereotyped "imitation" when Harney entered.

It was not until she had removed her comedic make-up, and came out for her last number, in a simple frock of white lawn, her hair in two thick ropes, that Harney perceived she had a certain sort of attractiveness, the grace of youth. Her singing was undistinguished, but in the dance that followed, she had the cunning to distract attention from her none too nimble feet by constant use of her hands, which she waved and twisted with good effect. Her very amateurishness, taken with her pretty face and youthful figure, was precisely what he wanted for his unsophisticated *Devonshire Maid*. The part was "actor-proof" if Connie Allerton had succeeded in it, and Ida Dare had the same sort of apparent innocence and simplicity.

So Ida was given special dancing instruction, and, when the opening night came, Mr. Harney's astuteness was rewarded. The morning after the New York première, the daily critics wrote of Ida Dare as though she had personally written the lines, composed the music, staged the piece, and

managed the "lights." They seemed to forget "The Devonshire Maid" had been running in London for two years. Ida shared their lack of memory.

Harlan K. Harney bore with her one and one-half troubled seasons, soothed by the extraordinarily large receipts of "The Devonshire Maid." He had, out of sheer kindness, advanced her salary when business began to be big, had even complied with her request that she be "featured,"—*i. e.*, that on programs and bill-boards her name be printed in type only slightly smaller than the name of the play; and when she demanded (she no longer "requested") a second increase in salary prior to leaving New York, he granted that, too. But to "star" her he refused; so when the next season came and she accepted a larger offer from a smaller rival he, instead of suing the ungrateful young contract-breaker, smiled gratefully.

"Just as soon as I took her out of 'The Maid'—where her appearance was worth something—I'd have been cheating myself paying her more than a hundred a week," he said. "I'd have had to get another show like that if she was going to be worth her salary, and that's like asking a biscuit to grow into a barrel of flour."

Gorsuch, then acting as Mandelbaum's librettist, proved he was right; and here is where Miss Darrell Darcy comes in.

"No, Mr. I-forget-your-name, really I never sing synco-pated music—not under any circumstances. It's quite vulgar—quite. And Mr. Labouchere, you must change this second verse—really. You have me say here: 'My heart is cold, my kisses ice.' Now my heart is *not* cold. I couldn't put any feeling into that, because it's not *me*."

"No, it's only the part," agreed Gorsuch pleasantly. "You see we were laboring under the error that you were an actress, Miss— what is your name again, please?"

Ida Dare's ears grew red, especially as Labouchere and

Hertz chuckled: then, pale with wrath, she picked up her parasol, and, with that dramatic dignity of exit which the actress early learns, crossed the huge stage of the York Theater, disappearing by the stage-door.

"The little upstart," said Gorsuch, breathing heavily. "I hope to God she hands in her resignation." Composer and lyricist echoed his wish with even more feeling and considerable profanity. "I'm glad you handed it to her, Laurie," said Hal Hertz, the composer. "'I never sing syncopated mu-sic,'" he sang in savage mimicry, "'quite vul-gah!' Forgets my name, does she? And three years ago she sat outside my office for hours, tears in her eyes, begging me to recommend her to Bob for a chorus-job—and me, soft-hearted fool, doing it."

The great Bob Ledyard, producer for Mandelbaum, now hurried from the other side of the stage and from a consultation with the costume-designer; he had observed the dignified Dare exit. He scolded in low tones but without conviction, for Miss Dare, although hardly venturing on any superior airs with one who had trained her as a chorus-girl, had irritated him, nevertheless, by insisting on certain mannerisms which decreased the pace of the show, an unforgivable offense in Bob's eyes.

But, since Miss Ida Dare had begun to feel at home stage-center, she hated to leave it, insisting on at least two encores, led by ushers and encouraged by stage-manager's tricks—also on taking final "bows," all of which "slowed up the show"; and while Bob concurred for peace at rehearsals, he had no intention of allowing them at performances.

But now she had committed the unforgivable sin. She returned with Arthur Mandelbaum, her face triumphant. Bob's became proportionately black; and now he, too, prepared to make a dignified exit. No theatrical production is ever brought to fruition without at least two or three such.

Mandelbaum, realizing, deserted Miss Dare and ran after Ledyard. Any rival would welcome the great Bob fifty times as heartily as ten Ida Dares.

"No use, Art," said Bob. "She should have come to me with her complaint. When any whipper-snapper ex-chorus-girl starts ignoring the producer, it's time for him to quit. You can't do anything without discipline. Send last week's salary to my home address. I make you a present of to-day's work and yesterday's. . . . No use, Art, unless you fire her. She's no wonder, anyhow."

Mandelbaum wrung his hands, beseeching pity for a poor manager who had signed an iron-bound contract for thirty weeks' salary out of a forty weeks' season. Then he ran to Ida Dare and demanded that she tender Mr. Ledyard an apology.

"I will, if that man over there"—she indicated Gorsuch—"apologizes to *me*."

"Oh, I apologize for her—I mean to her," said Gorsuch, surprising everyone. But Labouchere noted that his eyes twinkled maliciously. No sign of retaliation was given, however, all that day, and the rehearsals progressed in peace. However, Gorsuch nodded once or twice at Miss Dare, and Labby poked Hertz with his elbow.

"She thinks rag-time vulgar, does she?" Gorsuch had purred twenty times that afternoon, and when the trio gathered in Labouchere's studio just across from the theater stage-entrance he repeated it again, aloud. "Play that 'rag' of yours—Hal; I've got a good title for it, fine effects for Bob—'When the Piper of Hamelin Played Rag-time.' Remember Browning's poem? See what you can do, Labby."

Labouchere began hastily to scribble a lyric. "Give me that second line, Hall." "Tee-dum—tee—dum dum dumdum

dumdum dumdum tee," played Hertz slowly, and so continued for half an hour while Gorsuch sat meditating.

The operetta then rehearsing, in which Ida Dare was playing a principal part, would burst upon New York as an adaptation of a Berlin "success" by the composer of a highly profitable piece, the tunes from which had recently swept the country. As a matter of fact, it was one of the composer's early failures, and, outside the opening choruses and finales, little of his music would be used; as for the book, it was one of those domestic dramas the Germans love—"Corn beef and cabbage set to music," Gorsuch said: so book and music must be entirely rewritten at rehearsals by Gorsuch, Labouchere, and Hertz—all on salary to Mandelbaum, and a trio like no other in that world: well-educated youngsters whose abilities were far in advance of Broadway musical comedy, and who were engaged on it only because they had family claims that necessitated larger incomes than a devotion to artistic ideals would bring them; Gorsuch had a consumptive father in Arizona, Labby a recently widowed mother and a younger sister, and Hal Hertz one brother at law school, another studying medicine.

"Pipe where I stole that chorus?" said Hertz, leaving Labouchere to polish off his lyric, and dashing out a spirited syncopated melody. "Get it? No? Tschaikowsky, of course, and here's the strain of Russian folk-lore music that *he* took it from. The verse is just the 'Soldiers Chorus' from 'Faust.' See? Only a change of *tempo*. . . . It ought to catch on at every turkey-trot and tango tea a week after we open. It'll make some money for us, boys."

"That's what I thought when I first heard you play it—for Dare. It'll be the hit of the piece, and she don't like rag-time," said Gorsuch, wickedly. "D'you understand?"

"But who'll do it?" asked Hertz, puzzled. "I thought we'd have to save it for our next show. It's not suited to any of

the other women—and as it's a woman's song and Art Mandelbaum says the cast is too expensive already—”

“Don't you bother your head about that, my boy,” returned Gorsuch. “Look here. I'm going to teach that little cat a lesson. She can't sing for shucks; her dancing's all fake, and all she's got is that I'm-too-sweet-to-live and general expression of having sucked a persimmon so she could say ‘prunes’ and ‘prisms.’ I intend to give her all the nonsensical affectations to say that she thinks are pretty, and you do the same, Labby. What'll happen opening night? The audience will think it's a comedy part and roar their heads off. It won't hurt the show: it needs comedy. Instead of a sweet young miss, she'll be playing an affected little cat, and when Bob and Mandelbaum see how out-of-town audiences take the part, they'll let me write in a scene from ‘The Taming of the Shrew’ instead of that steal from ‘The Prisoner of Zenda,’—farce instead of romance.”

He was interrupted by a snort from Labouchere. “Can you see it?” he gasped. Hertz chuckled. The romantic scene, a moonlit one of coarse masculinity kneeling for forgiveness from chaste femininity—Ida Dare playing it in a thrillingly romantic voice, enjoying herself hugely—was one of the few portions of the original libretto remaining, and was that part of it which had tempted Ida to break her contract with Harney.

“We *make* these actors and actresses,” Gorsuch went on. “Of course, there are Bernhardt and Forbes-Robertson, and a few more, and some others with wonderful personalities or voices. But ninety-five times out of a hundred, an actor or actress is simply a person with enough conceit to believe everybody's crazy to pay money to see them strut around the stage. *We* do the rest. If the part's bad, *we're* rotten; if the part's good, *they're* immense. It's the part that counts—or the song. And that's where that ‘rag’ of yours comes in

Hal. That tune would make *anybody* well-known in a night—*anybody*."

"Who'll *sing* it?" asked Hertz, again.

"That's the point: she *won't*; the comedy woman's a Cockney; and it would be out of place for the *grande dame* or the adventuress. So, just to prove what I say, and to make Mandelbaum let me change that moonlight piffle to comedy, we'll cut out that weak dancing number that goes just before it, and put this one in. It's the last number (except that foolish duet Dare does with the *Duke*, which will also come out late) and just where the show needs a 'punch.' And the break's so natural, too. Have *Lady Gwendolyn* come strolling in with *Lord Archie*. 'What a quaint old tower! What is it?' Some fool comedy, *Archie* giving all sorts of nut explanations. I'll steal some of that 'Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court' stuff—knights riding bicycles, the Romans playing golf and drinking highballs, all that: it's old, but the older the jokes the more the audiences laugh at them. It takes a hundred years or so for the public to understand a *good* joke so they can all laugh at once. Then *Lady Gwendolyn* says: 'I don't believe you know what you're talking about'; enter *Gypsy Girl*; *Gwendolyn* asks her what about the tower. 'Why, the Pied Piper's Tower,' says the girl. 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin?' asks *Gwendolyn*. 'I don't believe that story: how *could* he charm *rats* just by playing music?' 'Ah, but he played rag-time, lady,' says the girl, and goes into the number. On first verse the dancing ponies as rats; second verse, 'medium' as street children; third verse, show-girls and sextette boys as *Lords* and *Ladies* in powdered wigs, etc.—all turkey-trotting after *Gypsy Girl* while she plays the pipes. Get it?"

"Immense!" said Labouchere, grinning. "It'll be guaranteed actor-proof. See what'll happen, Hal?"

"Sure," said Hertz, when Dare comes on to be romantic,

they'll keep on applauding for 'The Piper' and they'll have to take the moonlight off—"

"And, finally, Dare and the *Duke* will have to begin their scene while the audience is still shouting, and that'll kill any serious stuff."

"Which is what makes the idea so durned *great*," said Hertz, playing with one hand and writing down notes with the other; then, of a sudden, he ceased, becoming downcast:

"Who's to *sing* it?" he asked again.

"That's the point," said Gorsuch. "Just to prove it's *us*, not the performer, we'll pick out some unknown chorus girl—the prettiest one of the gypsy type. And just as Dare got all the press-notices over all the well-known people in 'The Devonshire Maid,' so this little girl, with *one song*, will get the notices over her."

"But will she *stand* for it?" asked Labouchere, anxiously.

Gorsuch began to count on his fingers: "First, she's too conceited to realize that any applause for a chorus girl will break up *her* scene—she imagines a dead hush will fall on them the moment she deigns to show herself. Second, Bob wants one big rag-time number so he can show off his dancing-girls' tricks, and he's sore on Dare anyway. Third, Mandelbaum won't dare cut out the hit of the piece, especially after paying for the expensive costumes of that number. Bob will O. K. them as if Dare were to do the song, so Mandy won't kick on ordering them. Fourth, when Dare refuses the song because rag-time's vulgar, that settles it and settles her. To get a big, fast show, Bob will rush her slow, sweet scenes and cut 'em down, and when somebody else has the hit of the piece, Mandy will let her go if she kicks on playing the part as light comedy. She'll begin to realize the importance of authors and composers by the time *we* get through with her."

Thus it was that Miss Darrell Darcy leaped into the lime-light.

"Of course, you know you haven't much of a voice," said Gorsuch, halting Hertz in his piano-playing to speak to Miss Darcy, who, in "practice" clothes—i. e., a pair of silk bloomers, a man's pajama jacket, socks upheld by a man's garters, and rubber-soled shoes—was standing alongside Labouchere's piano.

Miss Darcy nodded sadly, her long black lashes settling on her flushed cheeks.

"And you can't dance any better than any other average chorus girl," pursued Gorsuch. The girl nodded again, biting at lips the color of a Japanese rose. "As for your *acting*—well, let's not call it acting. And yet, Miss Darcy, you're going to be a great big hit."

Miss Darcy looked at him, puzzled, then blushed and began picking at her bloomers with little hands, and looking down at equally small feet. "Oh, *no*, Mr. Gorsuch," she said humbly.

"Oh, yes, Miss Darcy," he replied. "And why? Not because you can sing, dance, or act—you sing like a dancer, and dance like an actor, and act like a singer. That is, ordinarily. But because we three have worn ourselves out teaching you note by note, step by step, and each gesture and inflection separately, and because Mr. Mandelbaum has spent a thousand or so on the costumes of that number, and because Mr. Ledyard has worked overtime showing off all his dancing tricks for chorus encores, and, also, because the song is a great song, all the papers tomorrow will hail you as the hope of future American musical comedy."

In the abashed young woman, her socially prominent admirers, whom she ruled warningly, would not have recognized the "divinely beautiful" Darrell Darcy.

"Just don't add any ideas of your own, that's all," Gorsuch continued, with severity. "Kindly remember you're a phonograph inside a dancing doll. Get the stage doorkeeper to give you a hat-check for what you call your brains. Leave them in the key-rack at the stage-entrance. Remember, Hal Hertz's brains are in your singing, Labby's in your intonations, Mr. Ledyard's in your dancing, mine in your acting, and any one of them is forty times as big as your own—"

"Oh, say, Laurie," protested Labouchere, "wait a minute." Hertz, too, seemed about to intervene, but Gorsuch frowned both out of existence.

"And listen," he continued. "When you've made your hit, take these tips: Don't accept any part that has over a hundred words in it. It'll take longer than the regulation four weeks' rehearsals for you to learn to speak more than a hundred words correctly. And never take a song unless you're sure it would be a hit with *anybody* singing it—the kind the gallery boys whistle. And hire the best coach you can get to teach it to you word for word, just as we've done. Parts, too. Remember you've got nothing except your face and figure. Never forget that; no matter *what* you kid managers and critics into thinking, just keep saying to yourself: '*Gee, I'm lucky*'—lucky, that's all. Understand?

"And whenever you meet a man who can teach you something, don't start telling him how great you are; just keep still and listen to what he has to say. That's the only way you'll ever fool a clever man—by not talking. And, by and bye, you *may* learn enough to be able to keep up your end in an intelligent conversation. . . . It doesn't make any difference to *me*," he concluded, "but since we started you off, I thought I'd show you how you could keep it up. Well, so long! See you to-morrow night in Troy." For it was the last day of rehearsals and the piece opened out-of-town the next night.

The telephone bell had rung as Gorsuch finished, and Hal

Hertz, who had answered it, handed the receiver to Darrell. Her inquiry over the wire brought an answer from a young man who was so well-known that he could speak haughtily to the head-waiters of Canary's, and Curate's, the Fitz-Wedgewood hotels, the supper-clubs of Mayfair, the cabarets of Montmartre, and the restaurants of the Rue Royale, and the Riviera. But his tone was humble in addressing Miss Darcy.

"I've arranged a bang-up farewell dinner at the Château Versailles," he said. "We'll motor out of this hot hole of a city and have a great ride down the Motor Parkway at sixty miles an hour. You and I and—" He mentioned some names well-known to Wall Street. "And you can invite any girls you like. We'll have a swim in the lake when we get there. Some idea—what?"

Now it was a day of heat such as to try the souls of humanity; the hospitals were full, and men with no social position to jeopardize were walking the streets in that upper garment supposed to be seen only by the bedroom mirror. Therefore, Miss Darcy should have welcomed eagerly a thirty-five mile motor-trip with iced champagne, quail in aspic, and other costly luxuries, served at a rural table swept by breezes from a highly ornamental and expensive lake. But, while the young gentleman at the Racket Club talked, she had heard Gorsuch plan a most commonplace taxicab drive to a restaurant overlooking the Drive.

"No," she said into the telephone, "no, I can't possibly."

She cut short arguments and persuasions by repeating this in a tone colder, if possible; and the Racket Club booth held a young man to whom Long Island lakes and motoring had lost all charm. "I've got to hurry now," said Miss Darcy. "Then when you get back—opening night," entreated the crest-fallen one. "Let me give you a supper at Curate's: their big double private room. I'll have them put a thousand pounds of ice in it and electric fans to keep it cool, and—"

"Well, I'll *see*," said Miss Darcy. "I'll see. Good-bye." Thus coolly did she dismiss one who imagined her of all women the most wonderful, to smile upon one who thought nothing of the sort.

"You want to hustle into your clothes," said Gorsuch. "We've got to go to dinner now, and Labby's got to lock the door."

"I don't think I'll eat any dinner," said Miss Darcy, her tone in marked contrast to the one she had used over the wire: "I just can't bear the idea of going home to that stuffy little flat. May I stay here, Mr. Labouchere; I guess I can get a little breeze at that bay-window, and would you ask the restaurant next door to send up some sandwiches?"

Gorsuch moved to the window indicated as though to test its cooling qualities. They proved to be negligible. He removed his hat and fanned himself; but something besides the heat was making him uncomfortable, now.

"Well, hurry up in there," he called to where Miss Darcy was changing into her street-clothes. "If you hurry, maybe we'll let you come along with us." His tone was none too gracious and the proffered entertainment was such that, from the Racket Club young gentleman, it would have been regarded as an insult. To gain such gratitude as the young lady's acceptance evinced, the one who had telephoned must have spent a large part of his family fortune.

"Can't very well not ask her," muttered Gorsuch apologetically to his collaborators, "although it's a *bore*."

But when Miss Darcy appeared, radiant despite the heat, and Gorsuch was forced to consider her, for the first time, with other than a strictly professional eye, he was guiltily unsure that it *was* to be a bore.

Alone that night, Miss Darcy smiled complacently at her bedroom mirror. "Listen and don't talk—that's the only way to fool a clever man," she reflected. Presently she

stamped her foot: "I'll *make* him like me if I never say another word the rest of my life."

Which proves that an easy way to win a woman is by not trying to win her at all; but whether it is because of pique or because all women yearn for the happy days of caves and clubs, no man can say.

Five years later, Henry Lloyd Labouchere, author of "Noumeia, a South Sea Tragedy" and a prosperous copra merchant of Kaliokua, walked into Curate's and, where once he would have been hailed by at least nine out of every ten there assembled, saw a sea of stranger faces. All save one, that of a reporter for a theatrical journal who failed to recognize him because of his beard. Labby disclosed his identity.

"An uncle died out there in the South Seas and I was his heir," Labouchere explained anent his long absence from Broadway. "I'm only back for a visit. I went to sell out, but after I saw the Islands I realized what Stevenson meant when he said it was Paradise for a writing man."

"*You've* proved it, anyway, the stir you've made in the literary world," said the reporter, enthusiastically.

"I didn't have to *live* by my writing," returned Labouchere. "For all my wonderful notices and my picture in all the literary journals, I haven't made as much from all my books as I did on one musical comedy."

"Your two pals are in the same boat, then," said the reporter. "Hal Hertz married a rich woman crazy about music, and conducts a symphony orchestra that costs about twice as much to run as the public pay to hear it. And Laurie Gorsuch is writing novels—"

"I know," said Labouchere. "I get the English editions out there. He's the only *big* American novelist, in my opinion."

"He doesn't sell ten thousand copies apiece, though—English, American, Australian, Canadian, foreign editions thrown in," the reporter informed him. "He's married, too—luckily for him. *She* makes the money, although I guess if it wasn't for him Darrell Darcy wouldn't be any star. But he's her manager and press agent, and what he loses on his novels, he gets back on her shows."

"Laurie *married* her?" said Labouchere incredulously. "That little thing!"

"Guess he didn't have much to say about it," chuckled the reporter. "She just stuck around. Even if he didn't call for her after the show, she'd go from one restaurant to another until she found him, and then she'd come in and sit down at the table as if he was expecting her. And she'd trot around to his place and sit there darning his socks and sewing buttons on his shirts while we all talked away at transcendentalism and mysticism and paleontology and what-not—and never saying a word. When he was sick she came and nursed him; and finally—well, she just stuck around, I tell you and made herself useful, and put everything up to Laurie, until I guess he saw it was no use trying to dodge, so he married her. I guess he must have worked pretty hard with her, for soon after that she was featured, and two years ago, they put their own money into a show and put her name up. Been making barrels ever since. She's rehearsing a new piece over the way *now*. If you wait here, they ought to drop in, any minute."

They went on talking of other friends and their fortunes or lack of them, until the summer afternoon waned, and actors and actresses, stage-managers and authors, composers and leaders, all began to enter and in exhausted tones to call for cooling drinks. "There," said the reporter suddenly, pointing to a trio who had seated themselves at a table within earshot.

"The other two are that new composer and librettist Laurie dug up somewhere—college amateurs, I guess."

Labby was about to rise, but Gorsuch was talking earnestly, and Labby listened.

"I'm perfectly aware the contract I'm offering you is for less than you could get elsewhere," said Gorsuch tolerantly. "But you must remember, boys, that you have the inestimable advantage of an *artiste* to play your principal part and do your most important numbers. Yes, it's a great part, and they're bully numbers, but what's the difference how great a part is unless you have a great performer in it? Eh? It'll fall down, won't it? Songs, too. What's the difference between a million-copy hit and a piece of shop-counter music? Only the person who sings it. There're a thousand composers who *could* write hits, but only a few artists. What's the result? Only a few hits. Same way with plays—understand?"

The two boys nodded sagely each to the other. "Better go over and see my secretary, Parsons, and sign up, then," said Gorsuch. When they left him as people leave a benefactor, Labby laughed loudly, and crossing, tapped his friend's shoulder.

"Which do you really believe, Laurie," he asked, "what you told those boys, or what you told Darrell when we rehearsed her in the Piper song?"

"Labby!" said Gorsuch, and violently overjoyed, gripped his hand. "Dear old Labby! When—?"

"Answer my question first," interrupted Labouchere. "Which?" Gorsuch was laughing, too.

"What *I* told *Darrell*?" he asked, his eyes twinkling. "Oh, you mean what Lawrence Northrup Gorsuch told Miss Darcy? *That* fellow lives up in Westchester and writes novels, and he tells his wife to-day just what he told Miss Darcy then. But the man who was talking to those boys is supposed by his theatrical company to be *Mr. Darcy*, 'only her husband,'

and it's *his* duty to protect his wife against the slanders of such people as Lawrence Northrup Gorsuch. See? If he didn't, there wouldn't be any Gorsuch novels."

"Doing what you don't want to do so you can do what you want to do—I guess you're right, Laurie," said Labouchere thoughtfully. "On the same principle, H. L. Labouchere devotes half his time to being a copra merchant, so for the other half I can be Henry Lloyd Labouchere, poet. Eh?"

"And Hal Hertz escorts his wife to fashionable functions and lets her show herself off in horse-show and opera-boxes, and other places where peacocks plume themselves—sure," returned Gorsuch, and, immediately thereafter, laughed again. "Why not? It's our pleasure to work as we want to do, and as everybody else pays for their pleasures, why shouldn't we? Which, in its last analysis, is the answer to all life, Labby. So if you'll wait a little, while Miss Darcy's husband transacts a little more sordid business, he'll take you out to Westchester, to see that fellow Gorsuch, who has quite an admiration for the poetry of Henry Lloyd Labouchere."

"And—Ida Dare?" asked the critic, his enthusiasm for Conradian ethics tottering.

"She married a rich man's son, later, caught him up to his old-time tricks, left him, and being a good Catholic, refused him a divorce."

"Ah," said the critic, his faith in Conrad returning.

"But his father," pursued Gorsuch, "had climbed up every step of the ladder, from peddler to millionaire, with his foot on somebody's life, and his only excuse for piling up so much money was to found a family and pass the name on. Ida's husband was his only son, and, as Ida won't divorce him, the old man's punished for his rapacity by never seeing his ambition realized. Fairly well-constructed drama again, eh? Oh, I guess you'll find the Stage Manager of the Universe

is always on the job, if you take the trouble to dig deep enough into facts. Want any more?"

On his way home, as he passed an excavation, the critic hurled into it a volume that, aside from its ethics, contained much he should have cherished.

IV. "CLASS"

IF it is true that a Frenchman's tune, "The Marseillaise," gave France equality, then let that unknown negro "professor" who wrote the first turkey trot step forward and share his honors, for he has destroyed the last American social barrier. His should be the National Anthem instead of an out-of-date Teutonic tune, whose lyric contains not one single reference to the turkey trot and the grizzly bear. Has this anachronism brought "The" Avenue and Avenue A to the practices of blood brothers? We wot not. Away with it. Let us have something more typical of a nation whose pride is speed. Drop overboard art, education and breeding on the way: the man ahead hasn't got them; only those lunatics who tarry to admire sunsets and scenery, who linger at libraries and stop at picture galleries; some of whom, crowning idiocy of all, actually pause to wonder where they are going and whether they will like it when they get there.

With such half-witted persons as these we have, naturally, no concern—are we not a patriotic American? Let us, rather, consider the case of Rosa Riley, who, thanks to the turkey trot, stepped up from the Bowery onto Fifth Avenue and, hampered with none of those idiotic impediments, found herself very much at home there.

I

IN the world of vaudeville and musical shows, there is a type of man whose success depends almost entirely upon his

partner. He can dance every known step, can learn in a jiffy any new one, can speak lines without embarrassment, can even sing in an acceptable sort of way. But alone he never wins renown—lacking as he does that golden, gracious thing that, for want of its better understanding, is “personality.”

But given a partner with this gift, the team leaps into sudden prominence; these men have a most amazing ability for bringing out the best in others. Knowing their own efforts to be uninteresting, they subordinate them in such a way as to heighten their partners'. Theirs the questions, the partners the amusing answers. Theirs the laborious part of the dancing, saving their partners' breath for clever athletic tricks. Theirs the melody, showy trills and cadenzas for the partners. . . . Moreover, they are excellent business men and know how to get the best positions on the bill, the best booking, the most advertising for the money. . . . But lacking the partner, they languish.

Such was Dave Dunkerley, his habitat a certain Bon Ton Music Hall on the lower East Side. Here he played the piano for the moving pictures, did an eccentric song-and-dance turn to his own accompaniment on the banjo, played the principal part in the “after pieces”—tabloid burlesques put on at holiday times. These he also wrote—rather rewrote from the memory of many; selected tunes, rehearsed and staged them.

And each night, instead of prayers, he delivered himself of anathemas directed at the head of his former partner, Ed. E. McCue. Him he had found a drunken medicine-show shouter, had taught him to dance, had “staked” him to “new scenery”—his clothes being in collapse; with him had then “doubled up,” playing Northwestern low-priced vaudeville. Then, by dint of patience, cunning and foresight, he had managed to get booking that brought them as close to Broad-

way as the Bronx; persuading a powerful agent to make a journey to their "picture house."

But, unfortunately, the agent had come in a motor car belonging to one who had an interest in a firm that produced musical shows. This person had been so captivated by Ed. E. McCue's laughter-provoking performance that, next day, while the agent was making out a five-year contract with the team, McCue was summoned by Mandelbaum to prove his comic abilities. Which he did, and accordingly "signed" as second comedian in a production soon to see Broadway. Comedians are scarce there as they are everywhere else. . . .

McCue had spared Dunkerley the oral details of this arrangement, slipping off to Syracuse and the show, leaving behind only a querulous note. It then became needless for the agent to tell the deserted one that the contract was principally because of the deserter; who, rechristened "Ned McHugh," scored a Broadway hit with the very patter, songs and dances that Dunkerley had carefully arranged, better to bring out McCue's gifts of the gods, busy day and night while McCue was a "jolly good fellow" or was sleeping off the effects of being one. McCue was like any number of brainless clowns who never achieve anything beyond a bar-room celebrity, unless an author is moved to write a part that exactly fits their eccentricities and a stage-director coaches them until they reproduce it like a phonograph record. Dunkerley had been both author and director. Broadway has seen shoals of such celebrities; they remain to borrow its dollars and half-dollars on the strength of their "one part" fame.

Dunkerley grimly determined when he met such another that he would guard himself against any repetition of such a catastrophe. He had no doubt of meeting one: he knew that, everywhere, in the most unlikely places, there was plenty of talent of the "personality" sort; and that it was usually unaware of its own value and almost always incapable or

undesirous of marketing it. Meanwhile we find him at the Bon Ton Theater, living on next to nothing, willing to do any extra work that would add to the small stock of dollars he was putting away toward the "act" that, as soon as he found his "partner," would take him on the "big time" he had so narrowly missed. There was always a small standing "ad" in the cheaper professional papers that "performers" were "wanted" at the Bon Ton Music Hall; whither they came, amateurs and seedy professionals, were tried and found wanting.

Also he visited other places like the Bon Ton, ever on the alert for "personality." . . . He was to find it at a time and in a place where he had no reason to expect it—nor was she the sort of partner he had been seeking. She was, in fact, Rosa Riley.

II

It had been snowing all day, fitfully, gustily. The snow god in charge had been dozing, and the few flakes that managed to fall had slipped through his fingers. But, that night, Rosa Riley's fairy godmother sent to tickle his feet and freeze his whiskers her friend and ally the North Wind; and, that he might not turn into an ice god, he gave chase, flinging his darts wildly. . . . Which is all very well for gods: it keeps them healthy and prevents their taking on weight. But our little earth beneath them, their football, checker, chess and domino board, undergoes inconvenient alterations thereby.

For instance, when Dunkerley emerged from his Bon Ton Theater, yawning for his Brooklyn boarding-house, the car line south was snowbound, the Bowery a snowy highway of ice palaces until, far distant, a Gothic castle arose; a castle with snow ramparts innumerable, snow terraces, even an im-

mense portcullis and drawbridge—where had been Park Row and the Brooklyn Bridge, the latter (though this Dunkerley could not see) a shining white spider-web sprinkled with star dust.

None of this beauty appealed particularly to one who would have much preferred a warmly heated southbound car. He stood and cursed before plunging on downtown. But when one sinks several feet at every step walking is weary work; so, half way and half frozen, observing he stood near a huge square door that bore a numeral standing for a notorious dance hall, he rang the bell, gave the warder at the gate assuery in the name of the owner of the Bon Ton—a ward politician; and stepped in for a warming drink of whiskey.

The name passed him down a long, dark hall and into the sudden glare of a long, low-ceilinged room. At this entrance—someone having just dropped a coin into the maw of an automatic piano—there was a blatant blare of ragtime, accompanied by the scraping of chairs and the rattling of glasses. Somewhat to Dunkerley's surprise, he noted they were dancing the latest Broadway craze.

New Yorkers are the narrowest people in the world, Broadway the most narrow-minded street. A vaudeville performer had seen this dance on San Francisco's Barbary Coast (so called no doubt because it holds so many pirates). She had brought it East, hailing it as new, and it was immediately copied by producers. Dunkerley had been thinking of putting it on at the Bon Ton—as a novelty!! And here it was already popular—that knee-locked, swaying, shuffling intimacy, that turkey trot todolo, Spanish-negro harmony. Most of these people were dancing it as well as those Broadway paid to see; many danced it better; one young tomboy in a scarlet tam-o'-shanter and a short skirt did it so well that once his eyes fell upon her they remained there.

She had all the free, untrammelled grace of some lithe

young animal of the wild; and, as it was a frankly animal dance, he watched her as he might have watched the great God Pan, had he come upon him unawares in his native woods.

It served with Dunkerley the purpose for which it was originally devised, stirring his sex instincts until his blood hummed and hammered at his ears. Most people, endeavoring to emphasize suggestive movements, made the dance vulgar and offensive. With her it was but the unconscious expression of instincts and desires otherwise stifled.

And as Dunkerley saw her face, with its small features and sullen, mutinous yet withal eminently kissable red mouth, noted her lithe and lissom, slender yet rounded boyish figure, and the surpassing grace and sinuousness of her movements, he realized, suddenly, that here was the long-looked-for partner. Better than the best comedian, this girl; who could, in the reek of an ugly room, suddenly make a tired man desire her fiercely. . . . She seemed to radiate color, breathe fresh air, air of Pan's forest, seemed to be dancing alone against the skyline. Her hair was as vividly black as her skin was white; and her heavy eyebrows and long lashes framed some sort of sea-green eyes. Her skin seemed as soft as it was white and firm.

"Who is she?" he asked his waiter, a bored and non-chalant gallant in a "sporty" suit who sang between dances, and whom the question evidently touched on a sore spot. "That little chippy skirt?" he returned. "Look out for your souper while she's around—one of these-yere chicken gun molls. . . . No, she ain't got no fellow. She bust a bottle over a good guy's nut onct—and he jest give her a little kiss! Them kind of frails ain't no good to themselves nur nobody else neither. . . . I'll introduce you to a *regular* girl." . . .

Which Dunkerley hastily declined; and at the conclusion of the dance, before Miss Riley could resume her seat, approached her, card in hand, a professional card that read like

a theatrical advertisement. At this she glanced carelessly; and, though she excused herself to her friend, and permitted Dunkerley to pay for her drink, she was uninterested in what he had to say. In vain he outlined incontrovertible facts. The turkey trot was as yet in its infancy along Broadway. Pioneers always garnered prizes. Being a dancer of unusual ability and having a vivid personality, with him to direct her it was impossible she should fail. He had the money appropriately to costume the act. He knew how to get them a hearing. . . . And so forth and so on. He was amazed at his lack of success in impressing her: she must be the worst sort of ambitionless dullard.

But, when she spoke, he saw this was not so. The girl's English was execrable: she converted principal diphthongs into broad "d's"; had an exceedingly limited vocabulary and mispronounced the simplest polysyllables. Of all this she seemed aware, and told him so. "Me? I'd be a fine-lookin' object uptown, *I* would!" she concluded scornfully. "Whadda I wanta go up agen people thatt'd give me the horse laff every time I open me trap? I'd be sore on meself all d' time, and sore on d' world, and wantin' to scrap wid everybody. I'd tryan talk right and I'd make nothin' but breaks. Not in mine, mister. I'm just right where I am. I ain't got a neducation, but I'm wise how to git by and live nice an' not work like a dog neither. So much obliged, but nothin' doin', an' thank you for the drink an' so long." . . .

Her words and her gesture were final. Dunkerley took himself off with something else to swear about besides the weather—returning on several occasions within the next week. On his third visit she flew into a rage: she would "bend somethin' over his beezer if he didn't let her alone." She'd told him no until now she was tired. . . .

It was nothing short of miraculous then that there appeared in the Bon Ton Music Hall less than a week later a

chastened young miss who spoke so softly that Dunkerley must several times request a repetition. Gone were scarlet tam-o'-shanter, violent checked skirt, tawdry blouse of imitation "baby Irish," huge bows of ribbon to her shoes, loud speech and rowdy gestures. She had not even interrupted his rehearsal with the film man—he was fitting musical accompaniments to the weekly change of reels; but sat huddled up in a back seat until Dunkerley discovered her. When he did, she said, in a very low, indistinct voice, that, were it possible his offer had been serious, she begged forgiveness for her ignorant, common behavior and would do whatever he suggested. Only she thought it fair she should be allowed to pay her part and would buy her own costumes; but she wished a "gentleman friend" of hers might accompany them at their selection as she strongly desired his (the gentleman friend's) approval. . . . It was then that Dunkerley noticed that she wore the most somber of clothes: plain white waist with coat, skirt, hat, gloves, shoes and stockings, all of black.

Dunkerley lowered his voice and adopted the manner generally used for inquiry as to death in the family. She giggled nervously. "I—I didn't know what else to *g-get*," she explained; then virtuously: "I hate loud clothes."

III

WHEN, a few days later, they went to order her costumes, Dunkerley's suspicions of her metamorphosis was confirmed by the sight of the "gentleman friend." There was something about this youth that Dunkerley vaguely identified as "class"—the sort of thinness that gives height and that glorifies clothes; a small mouth—and a weak one; and hair that lay so smooth on his small head and shining scalp that it looked as though it were painted there. . . . This person bestowed

upon Miss Riley an almost beneficent patronage. He took an interest in that little girl, he told Dunkerley; he wanted to see her a ripping success. Rosa could hardly contain herself for pride. She referred to him as Mr. Moncure, but sometimes, timidly, ventured on "Charlie."

Mr. Moncure took the affair of the costumes entirely into his own hands: he had a sister, he said, who was the best-dressed little filly that ever was foaled, and the little filly knew what was what in clothes. He waved away all suggestions as to costume firms, and whirled them off in a taxi to an "*atelier*" where he began to bully a Frenchman in a silken waistcoat and tie to match, a person so gorgeous that Dunkerley addressed him as "sir." But to Mr. Moncure, he was less than a gum-chewing shop-girl. This was conventional—that was cheap—those clashed—that was too much Montmartre.

"Look here, man, this girl's what you might call untutored—wild—a little savage." (He did not seem to mind Rosa in the least.) "Her costumes must suggest that. Fig leaves and tiger skins. Corking idea. Tiger skin: black and yellow—skin-tight effect—that's one costume. And the other. Think of her naked except from some sticky stuff and the leaves just falling and stick to her! Autumn leaves. They've got her colors. All kinds of reds and yellows, particularly yellow—tawny yellow. These costumes ought to make you a bigger 'rep' than ever if you do 'em right. Not often you get a chance at a freak type like her—healthy young savage. . . . Never mind about the expense—you get the costumes *right*."

Cutside, Dunkerley ventured to remonstrate. "We can't afford—" he began; but Moncure cut him short. "Anybody can afford the best," he said. "Now, for you—" He measured him with a critical eye. "By the bye, you must have your hair cut decently. I'll take you to my tailor for your dress clothes, and then we'll have your top hat and shoes made to

order. You cut along, little girl—your part of it's done. 'Phone me later. I've often wanted to see a vaudeville team dressed *right*," he told Dunkerley as they left her. "They always look such *muckers*." . . .

Before the morning was over, Dunkerley found he had contracted to pay as much for a silk hat and a pair of pumps as he had expected to pay for his clothes; the clothes came to almost as much as what he had figured would costume the act. Meeting Rosa for rehearsal, she seemed to expect him to share her awed admiration for this person who had plunged them into debt. "Isn't he *wonderful*?" she asked. And then, because she wanted to talk of her beloved, part of the story came out.

Moncure, on a drunken ramble, had stumbled into the dance-hall a few nights before, had caught her around the waist, and whirled her into the dance without so much as "by your leave." High words had followed with the very same waiter who had informed Dunkerley concerning Rosa; Moncure resenting his familiar address to her—the result a fight in which the hardy explorer was pulled down, deer and dogs, hurled out hurt and bleeding. He would have lost his watch and money, too, if she had not swiftly possessed herself of them before any other could do so; had then gone with him to bathe and bind up his hurts. . . . This was as much as she would tell Dunkerley. It was doubtful if she understood what had followed.

No man may win a woman utterly until he has been both her master and her child. Both instincts must be stirred, the ages-old primitive one that caused her to cower before the club of the caveman, the even older thrill of a baby at her breast. Until ye are as little children ye may not enter the Kingdom of Love. A man having convinced a woman of his strength, she pardons any weakness save cowardice. Pardons? Nay, welcomes. It is an emphasis of his need

of her. And, as Moncure lay back on his sofa, very pale and white, he had caught her hand, feebly. Cold, it became burning hot, his also. As he opened his eyes, she had seen him through a mist; and when he drew down her lips, they were utterly his.

She had skipped the next morning, also, in telling Dunkerley. With Moncure, taking for granted that, having given herself at last, he was as much hers as she was his, she had spoken of other nights. But Moncure's had been only a drunken passion and he wanted to be rid of her. He had found reasonable objections in her calling; for, that he might not underestimate the value of her devotion, she had begged him not to confuse her with the easy-virtued woman of the dance-hall: she was, if anything, rather vain of her dexterity as a pocket-rifler.

But Moncure had looked grave, pointing out how impossible this made any further intimacy. If he could afford to support her . . . But he could not. It was better they separate before they grew to care too much for each other.

With her scanty vocabulary, even if she had made shift to tell this to Dunkerley, she could not have explained the effect upon her of the morning sunlight on Moncure's old mahogany, on the shining silver of the toilet-table, on Gramercy Park just over the way. She shuddered at a picture of the police entering such a place in search of a thief—such a desecration was impossible. For the moment, she had been on the point of succumbing to fate. He was right. Since he could not support her, he could not ask her to cease stealing; and her lack of education made her unfit for any other occupation except that of a servant, or else the hardest kind of work in factories and sweatshops; and his apartment was equally no place for a girl with work-hardened hands and coarse clothes.

But she had looked at him and could not—there is some-

thing fiercely faithful about one who has kept herself so long for her first lover. . . . Then she had remembered Dunkerley's card, and, for her, the problem was solved.

IV

HAD her sharp little eyes been able to peer deep into the mind of Mr. Moncure, she would not have been so sure. All the time that young man had been in her company and that of Dunkerley's, he had suffered exquisite tortures. Suppose he should be seen by men of the club, or women of his calling-list. For the thousandth time he cursed his drunken passion. Not that the thought of her seduction gave him any qualms: that, to his mind, was the only redeeming feature of the adventure—to conquer a fortress that had been besieged so much and held so long: another confirmation of his celebrated charm. But self-esteem could be gratified at too high a cost: he must now rid himself of his *incubus*. He had never imagined that to "make herself worthy of him," she would even discard the gaudy clothes so dear to those of her type, much less abandon a congenial calling for hard work and study.

If she would only come to him now and then—but she wanted his companionship, his instruction, his assistance—as to-day, for instance. . . . Now Mr. Moncure's position in society was none too secure: with an income of less than twenty thousand a year and of no particularly prominent family (his father had been a cloth-merchant in Philadelphia), he must know only the rightest kind of right people, else could never take the position he coveted. He wanted to lead cotillions and be the favorite of the fair, to be quoted for his witty sayings and good taste and otherwise to be a leading light familiar to all newspaper readers.

To achieve all this, he had come up to New York from his native town a few years earlier and had eaten through any quantity of humble pie into a good club. To be seen about with favorites of fortune, he willingly performed for them such services as rushing ahead to restaurants to engage tables, waiting at stage doors to make the acquaintance of the girls they desired to meet; otherwise played the courtier and sycophant, in return for which he was invited to week ends at country places and on yachting trips, where he met the sort of women he wished to know.

It is on such retainers that the brunt of amusement falls should the party become dull: they must know the latest laughs, the newest novelty, must be able to advise on frocks or design masquerade costumes, select wallpaper and draperies for a new room, hunt through the antique shops for period furniture, think of striking oddities for Mrs. Van Susan's cotillion favors. And, particularly, they must be careful not to get into a scandal with the wrong people. A duke may walk arm in arm with a prizefighter or be seen publicly with a chorus girl; but for one of Mr. Moncure's sort either feat would be fatal. Leaders of society enjoy the sensation of holding in their hands the lives of their subjects. Like the Roman populace, they relish the knowledge that to destroy a life they have only to turn down their thumbs.

Hence Mr. Moncure was not present at the opening of the new act either out of town or in it.

V

To do him all justice, it cannot be denied that he played a large part in levitating Miss Riley. Aside from the genesis: that she would never have attempted to rise had she not met him; he had enabled the team to dress in an entirely

different manner from any other team then performing: and moreover, had communicated two small secrets almost entirely confined to men of good clubs—the lack of which spoils the effect of the smartest dress clothes: teaching Dunkerley how to accomplish a smart dress necktie by tying only one end and concealing the other, showing him how much more effective is a silk hat when worn to show the forehead and cover the back of the head . . .

But his best bit of advice, that which was to assist Rosa so materially in her advance, was given for a selfish reason. He had not then had Billy Ransome's invitation to a Mediterranean yachting cruise, and wanted to protect himself should her introduction to any prowling men friends become unavoidable. An intrigue with a foreign artiste was usual enough to pass unremarked; whereas one with a child of the Bowery would be too good a story to keep and would eventually reach the wrong ears. A foreign accent would explain that regrettable tendency of Rosa's to delete diphthongs in favor of single consonants, would provide for otherwise fatal double negatives and any number of similar solecisms. But *what* foreign accent? Not French: too many spoke it. Spanish was better. If only she were dancing Spanish dances!

It was then he remembered to have seen this very turkey trot danced to a sort of Spanish music. Paris—the Abbaye—the Tango Argentino—the very thing! He had hurried to suggest it to Dunkerley; who was sufficiently the good showman to be impressed.

"Tango Ar-gen-ti-no," he repeated, fascinated. "Some name! That's a *great* idea! I'll change the music right away—there's a lot of Spanish 'rags.' Can you give me an idea of the *tempo*?" And then as Moncure hummed: "I see—sort of a draggety rag. That slow stuff'll make it all the better for a whirlwind finish. Great—great stuff. . . . But

I don't like that name you've got for *her*. Can't you think of another?" . . .

Eventually they settled on La Zoë; it was not quite Spanish, just right for an Argentine corruption, they thought. "Just the right kind of familiar sound, too," Dunkerley agreed triumphantly. "People'll think they've heard it before. It's something like somebody's—"

"La Loie?" Moncure smiled tolerantly.

"Sure," said Dunkerley, "La Lo-ey, La Zo-ey—there you are! The public never remembers much nearer than that after a few years."

Which proved to be correct. It tricked even the agent, who, on the strength of Dunkerley's former success in picking the now well known Ned McHugh, had secured for them a try-out in an obscure Jersey town. "La Zoey," he had muttered; "you will have to change that, Bo. There's one knocking around somewhere already." And then when Dunkerley had explained: "Good business," he laughed, very well pleased. Such impressions properly handled meant extra salary, and he was again to draw up a five-year contract and take ten per cent. "Tell you what, though," he added: "tie a can to that Dunkerley part of it: La Zoey and Dunkerley don't fit. Play up the 'Zoey' big and black, and put a line under it: 'Assisted by M. Dunkerley'—M. meaning Monseer. That's what those classy foreign acts are doing. And, say, I hope you got an iron-bound contract with her: these dames are worse'n actors."

"Say," returned Dunkerley scornfully, "she couldn't take an engagement in heaven without me. She can't even get married and retire. She's got to go right on dancing even if she married Rockefeller—unless her husband buys me off. If she quits me, I can sic the law on her and take away every nickel she's got. I paid a lawyer twenty-five to draw up that contract; and an eel couldn't squirm out of it."

"Too bad you didn't think of that with Ned McHugh," commented the agent. "He's gone over to Abrahams at three hundred and fifty dollars."

Dunkerley shook his head. "I'm going to put him in my prayers," he replied. "This girl's worth a dozen of Ed. E. McCue. Watch our smoke—you'll see."

VI

MR. FIGBAUM did see, very much to his profit. To him must be granted some of the credit due La Zoë's success; for, before bringing them to New York, he had the foresight to have the act booked through a series of minor towns; where Miss Riley lost her nervousness at the sight of audiences; where Dunkerley, good showman that he was, "speeded it up" until the entire twenty minutes seemed a series of whirls and gyrations so varied as to give audiences no time to grow weary.

The number of "calls" increased night by night. Closing night on the road, he was compelled to make a speech for her, in which she deplored her lack of English to respond adequately to their gratifying appreciation. It was wonderful for one who had been so great a favorite on her native heath to meet with similar affection among strangers—but she would not call them strangers *now*: hereafter this would be a second home to her. . . . The agent, out in front, decided this to be a master stroke; "keep it in." On their New York opening, he would have a band of iron-handed ushers insist upon a speech. It was good for an extra paragraph in all the papers.

As it turned out, however, the ushers were not needed. New York audiences always applaud a foreign artiste on principle. Even though bored with the act, they fear they

have missed some subtle merit a lack of appreciation of which will loudly proclaim their ignorance. And when actually pleased, the thought that their taste is up to the standard of more artistic countries is so gratifying that their applause is thunderous.

And, that a male dancer might look like a gentleman: that he and his female partner might perform difficult gyrations dressed as though for the Opera, that they danced to rag-time music—hitherto associated only with buck and wing and cakewalk teams, music that the audience could whistle and understand: these were anomalies. Add to this the effect of “class” produced by a pair of monogrammed velvet curtains drawn aside by a footman in black plush livery, powdered wig, white silk stockings and buckled shoes, disclosing a stage draped *à la Reinhardt* with the softest of colorless hangings which the calcium caused to assume a bewildering succession of colors—and you will have some idea of the novelty of La Zoë’s effect upon people generally unused to artistic effort.

In the center of it all bloomed the South American Tiger Lily—as the advertisements read—the lithe young savage who danced first the “Tiger Tango” in her “creation” of black and yellow, second the “Forest Tango” in her “falling leaves” costume and in a rain of rainbow light from the calcium, an autumn rainbow of dusky reds and dim yellows. Her final appearance, in a blaze of whites and ambers, was in a Pierrette’s blouse of yellow, with black dots, tights to her waist, one silk-stockinged leg yellow, one black, each adorned with a jeweled garter, in one of which was thrust a gleaming cross-hilted dagger; and they closed the act with an Apache turkey trot. There was little breath left in Dunkerley to make his speech.

VII

EVEN when a writer confines himself strictly to history, there are dissatisfied carping incompetents who complain that stories of the stage are not gloomy enough: the heroine always achieves success—"so different from real life." . . . A deceiving half-truth this, worse than a lie. Most of the people worth writing about *do* achieve success, their kind of success, artistic, financial—rarely both, 'tis true. Every week the serious journals or the penny press promote from obscurity some now aspirant. Many with names unfamiliar to the public succeed in winning the praise of certain circles—the only kind they covet. People of genius, talent or striking personalities seldom remain unknown for long. *Au contraire*, many achieve renown who have only brazen effrontery or good luck.

To write of failures is to write dull stuff. Only their self-conceit warrants their bad humor with a world that will have none of them. History is the record of the unusual: had none of us been above the average, we would still be living in trees. The monkeys have the only perfect democracy.

As for success on the stage, that is the easiest of all. We would rather that you engaged in conversation the average theatrical celebrity than that we paused to prove this. Squaring the square, pointing the pyramid or rounding the circle is work for sapient dullards such as, say, professors of dramatic literature. We ourselves have Rosa Riley's history to complete—and are at a critical moment in her career.

In the midst of her first night success, she was silent, sullen, obdurate. Dunkerley with difficulty kept from her dressing-room other agents, representatives of booking offices and theatrical firms, reporters for the professional publications; telling tales of overstrained temperament, shattered

nerves, syncope, a physician in attendance. His agent took charge of the business men; Dunkerley satisfied the reporters—it being a well-known fact that in the average theatrical journal any story is true if backed up by sufficient paid advertising.

Rid of everyone but the agent, Dunkerley requested La Zoë be left to him. "Don't worry about it," he said composedly, referring to a recent exhibition of wrath on her part. "If I'd had St. Peter harnessed up the way I've got Riley, there'd be no Catholic religion." The agent went, relieved of worry: any extended acquaintance with Dunkerley gave people considerable reliance on his word.

He had locked Rosa's dressing-room door in case she should be dressed before him. When she began to pound on it, he joined her, ready for the street. Disregarding her angry protests, he forced himself into her cab. She drove to Mr. Moncure's address; and, careless of precedents regarding janitors, awoke the Cerberus of that series of smart bachelor apartments. He proved to be a mild, mutton-chopped Englishman of the family-servant class; hence he displayed no resentment at anything for which he was paid. If she was a Miss Riley, Mr. Moncure had left a note, yes, miss. He couldn't reely say, miss, where he'd gone; no doubt he would communicate. And, it being a cold night and he in his shirt and trousers, would she be good enough to excuse him—meanwhile, with the utmost deference, closing the door.

The opened note fell from Rosa's hand. Dunkerley struck a second match. Mr. Moncure wrote to say that by the time this reached her he would be off the Azores. He had thought it all out and decided that was best for both. She was unhappy endeavoring to be what she was not: he had seen that, and it made him unhappy, too. So, much as he wanted her, he was afraid nature had put too many obstacles in the way of

their—er—friendship. He could never marry her—it was best to be frank. . . .

"I never *wanted* him to marry me," she was sobbing while Dunkerley read all this—as caddish a note as male ever penned female. Not that Rosa saw it that way. From half an hour of her incoherence, Dunkerley gathered that Moncure had acted like a real gentleman. Accustomed to the society of superior women, her coarse speech, vulgar manners, lack of education and reasonable conversation had been too much for a super-sensitive soul. "I g-g-guess he c-c-couldn't st-st-stand me any longer. And I was tr-tryin' s-s-so hard t-to be worthy of h-h-him, wa-wa-wasn't I, Bill?" She called Dunkerley "Bill" for some unknown reason: probably because she had known more "Bills" than any other males. . . . He had the man drive twice through Central Park before she calmed down and announced her intention of quitting the stage.

It wasn't no use, she said (to escape her phonetics it is best partly to translate); she couldn't go on. Bill knew she wouldn't have began only for *him*, and now *he'd* beat it, she didn't see no reason for being unhappy. She would go where her friends wasn't ashamed of her and she didn't have to speak with no foreign accent and pretend not to understand plain American. Did he (Bill) think that she was going to be cooped up in hotel rooms all her life and not talk natural to nobody but him? She wasn't, then! She'd like to see herself. Money? What good was money if you didn't have friends to spend it on or with—if you even couldn't go out and have a drink and a dance for fear you'd make a break? She could make plenty of money anyhow. Jail? What was the difference between jail and being cooped up in a hotel room? You had people to talk to in jail anyway—the kind of people you was used to. . . . It didn't make no difference how much he talked, she wasn't going to do it.

She'd finish the week and that was all. Contract? Pooh-pooh for the contract. Let him take all she'd made—she didn't care. . . . And the sobbing began afresh.

Dunkerley waited for this to subside before playing his ace. Then he told her, quietly, that she would not only finish the week but the month and the year besides. Then, if she still insisted, she could go; but he knew by that time she'd have come to her senses. . . . Which effectually banished all feminine weakness and roused her old belligerency. Dunkerley quieted her by strong hands on her wrists.

"Now you listen to me," he said. "I've waited half my life for a chance like this. Think I'm going to be wept out of it by a damn'-fool kid? If it wasn't for your own good, I wouldn't say a word. But the way it is, if you make one break, I'll have you jammed into the Bedford Home to-morrow, and you'll do three years as an incorrigible. You're under eighteen, ain't you? Your parents are dead, and it won't be hard to prove you were a pickpocket. Now you mind what I say. I *mean* it."

For the second time in her life, Rosa Riley thrilled at the sight of a man's eyes looking into hers. But Dunkerley was not thinking of thrilling her, but of those forty weeks on the P. and K. circuit. Anyhow, had the thrill been compared to that other one inspired by Moncure, she would have indignantly resented the comparison; and would have been incredulous if informed that a woman's bitter hatred for a man is but a degree removed from fierce affection.

VIII

SHE became, thereafter, a woman with a secret sorrow plus a grievance. And as a woman, when she has sustained any grievous hurt from a man, delights in making other men

miserable, she began to take positive pleasure in the rôle of the cold and distant foreigner. During their travels throughout the country, she enjoyed the sight of men in front smitten by her charms less than passing them coldly by at the stage door. She loved to seem all feminine softness in hotel lobbies and dining-rooms; but at an approach "drew herself up proudly with flashing eyes." Or, else, when Dunkerley could not avoid introductions—mostly in Pullmans—she pretended to know so little English as not to understand even so simple a request as her company at dinner, looking all the more puzzled as they grew more ardent, returning the most willful answers possible—the sort to make their professions of admiration sound absurd. . . . She seemed to derive the utmost satisfaction in driving them to despair—for few elderly men or youngsters could look on her beauty unmoved and, after they had seen her dance, she seemed to inspire some of them with sudden madness. Several times college boys followed her from one town to another. Once it was an elderly and respectable widower with much money and many children, whom she pretended to misunderstand through three weeks of one-night stands, and finally left swearing to blow out his brains—in which he unduly flattered himself. . . .

A little of this, however, soon served to appease her indignation against men in general, and she adopted a new pose; explaining her gentle melancholy to her admirers with any preposterous story that happened to come into her head—the sudden death of a dearly loved husband, parent, sister or child, always by some violent means, a railway accident, an earthquake, a fire. These tragedies narrated in broken English, supplemented by sobs, were so infinitely pathetic that they checked the most ardent overtures. But this was not enough to divert her during the long days of life in strange cities, and she surprised Dunkerley one day by engaging him in her first friendly conversation since the night of the

catastrophe. More than ever was he delighted, for, though he had impressed on her the necessity for reading and study if she was ever to discard her pretense of foreign speech off the stage, she had studiously and insultingly returned all the books he bought for her.

"I want some books, Bill. No, not to study," she added hastily. "Stories to read. About society—the real thing with dooks an' nearls and swell dames. I want to know how they talk an' nact and what all they do. A big bunch that'll last till this damn' trip's over. You only got six more months, Bill," she reminded him maliciously. She had taken a real pleasure, ever since that night, in marking off each day of the year; on leaving him each night, never failing to remind him of his promise that she was another twenty-four hours nearer her release from bondage. "Don't forget. A year was all I was to serve," she had said over a hundred times. And once he had been unwise enough to reply: "You talk as if you were in jail!" What answer he got must be sufficiently obvious.

But now she spoke graciously and wanted books, and next morning he spent all the hours up to matinée time in questioning salesmen and selecting titles. Rosa had to buy a small cabin trunk to contain them: he had cornered the market in society fiction, English, American and Continental. From that time on she was seldom seen without a volume in hand; and one day she gave a surprisingly good imitation of an English character in one of the plays they had seen—she had fallen into his habit of hurrying out of her make-up in order to see the last acts of plays.

His applause at her portrayal gratified her; and she took to reading speeches from her books aloud to him—almost always they were of some superwomen, skilled in the art of intellectual conversation that would not have discredited a De Stael, or else they had Whistlerian repartee at their tongue

tips. She was either a born mimic, or else had developed the faculty as so many street children do; and now that it occurred to her to put the speaking of good English on the footing of an imitation, like her South American broken English, she began to learn words and inflections rapidly. But so much did she regard all this as mere impersonation, she was unconscious that to give Dunkerley the full benefit of the contrast, she must force herself to recall certain old Bowery tricks of speech. Never did she imagine seriously that it was possible for her to pass even as one who dwelt near Moncure's borderline.

"The more I read the more I realize how right *he* was, Bill. I don't even see now how he put up with me for a few weeks. Just listen to this"—she read some brilliant worldly dialogue between two women of the type. "To think of me ever thinking *I* could talk like them! And there was a piece in this other book—I marked it for you to explain to me." . . . She found the annotation and gave the text: the conversation of a girl and a man upon some esoteric subject, certain symbolistic parts of which Dunkerley failed to make clear. "You see—even you're not wise to it. And *you've* got an education. What a chance for me!" She relapsed into a deep and impenetrable gloom.

IX

SOMETIMES, when he left her for the night and she was not sleepy and was tired of reading, she thought it would have been pleasant if he could have remained and talked to her. And on cold Northern nights when she must plunge her thinly clad young body between cold linen sheets—Dunkerley insisting on bedroom windows being open for her health's sake—she would shrink from going to bed at all, and when

she finally did go would double up in a mouselike knot, in an effort to keep herself warm, and consider how lonely her life was. Then she would force herself to think sadly of her faithless Adonis, her fashionable Aramis, her fascinating Eugene Wrayburn; would send herself to sleep in exquisite misery, picturing him surrounded and adored by the incomparable females of her novels. . . . Yet it was beginning to annoy her to a degree that Dunkerley seemed to be unaffected by her charms. Although his case was hopeless, she wanted him to know that it was hopeless; for him to be heart-whole and odiously self-satisfied was annoying to one who was pining away. True, she showed no outward signs of the inward cancer; but, she would have told you, a *woman* would understand . . .

Dunkerley realized that she still hugged to her thoughts of Moncure; so mastered those hot waves of passion that at times possessed him as suddenly as the one that had swept the blood into his eyes at first sight of her. At first, it had not been necessary to guard himself: she plainly showed she considered him obnoxious; but when she became companionable he was quick to formulate rules to protect his business interests, rules to keep him always the partner, never the man. Hence he always quitted her room before she began to yawn, avoided her until she sent for him, booked their Pullman berths far apart, never suggested they should patronize the same hotel nor have a single meal together—until in time, as such things do, it became a game with him: a game to which he continually contributed new rules and invented new moves; at which he became so expert that he forgot it was a game at all.

There are many men for whom beautiful women learn to care, who, if they had met them only casually, would have stirred in them no emotion whatever. But let any masterful man, competent and not unattractive, be the continual com-

panion of a beauty and fail to be moved to infatuation, and she becomes vexed and curious: such indifference is a tacit accusation of failing fascinations; and, if she be heart-whole in putting forward additional efforts to snare this wary one, will often fall in her own trap. Rosa soon came to the point where Dunkerley's expertness in the game annoyed her beyond measure. Besides, she was lonely, and loneliness exaggerates the virtues of companionship. Moreover, playing two performances a day, she had no chance to know any other man well, so began to find estimable and lovable qualities in Dunkerley. She did not dare confess this even in secret: that would be to rob herself of some of the sad satisfaction of one who has loved and lost and never again can love at all. She was conscious only of a vague irritation at his callous nature; and decided, to soothe her wounded pride, that such men as he were too commonplace to feel strong emotion. "It's too bad," she told herself candidly, "because he really could make *some woman* happy." Which is a decided concession for a woman: it is a habit of the sex to be astounded at any infatuation for males who do not suit their own notions of what males should be.

Then one spring day, they were summoned back to New York. One of a pair of tango dancers had broken her ankle, and the moguls of the P. and K. circuit were heavily interested in a musical revue in which the appearance of such a pair was necessary to the success of a certain scene. And as they had been seen in New York in a "family house" and for only two weeks at that—having then been sent on tour because they conflicted with better-known bookings, the act was new to "smart" audiences; who were more frankly surprised than those of vaudeville at the sight of a dancing team in clothes and frocks that they themselves would have been glad to wear. The novelty of the costuming of La Zoë and her partner amply made up for the fact that their dances were

no longer new—every known variation of the tango and turkey trot having been recently shown. The first night applause continued until they could only bow—a rare happening before blasé New York audiences; and, next day, the “critics” had their usual say concerning “poetry of motion” in explanation.

The real explanation was that, at last, there had been found an amusement sufficiently primitive and requiring little enough thought to appeal to a whole cityful of mental dwarfs; whose lack of any enthusiasm for opera or music generally, or serious interest in the theater, or the ability to amuse themselves with conversation (even if they could make it) concerning those topics which absorb intelligent people in other countries, had left a yawning gap of boredom. At last the idle overdressed women of all classes had something which would divert them, yet abet their man-hunting—their only congenial occupation; heightening their lure by giving men the sight of sensuous movements and by allowing them the intoxication of a closer physical contact that, yet, surrendered nothing.

So that, soon after the show opened, Dunkerley was informed by the house-manager of certain queries as to whether La Zoë and her partner would care to impart instruction in the tango and the turkey trot. If so, the management would be only too pleased to tender the use of the tea-room for the lessons.

“Some ‘ad,’” said the press agent. “We’ll have Sunday stories all over the country, with flashes of you and the little lady and all these society skirts trotting in our own little theater. Some ‘ad’ all right. Some regular money for you, too.”

X

THE lessons had been in progress for a week or more before Rosa put in an appearance. Dunkerley told her every night of a new social favorite who had joined the class. He entreated her to take some of the work off his hands. But besides hating the women whom she believed to have separated her from Moncure, she was afraid of them. With their sparkling wit and polished manners, their vast knowledge of matters artistic, musical, literary, international, historical—"and everything," as she put it—she feared that their simplest inquiries, even their usual choice in words, would put her at so decided a disadvantage that her discomfiture would be damnable. Might awaken suspicion, too, in such brilliant minds, as to that South American derivation now so well established. Dunkerley must remember she had met nobody but plain people so far. These women would see through her pitiful pretense. "I don't *want* half the money," she shrieked a dozen times. "*You* teach 'em: *you* take it. It's *yours*. Stop calling it *ours*."

But when the first week had yielded more than two hundred dollars in fees, Dunkerley saw that Rosa was impressed. "I tell you what," he said: "you've got these women rated too high, Zoey. I wish you'd come down and look 'em over before you make me hire somebody to help me. Anyhow, I'd lose a lot of 'em if I did. I've been stalling 'em along, saying you weren't well. They expect you every day. I don't know how they'll take it if I have to tell 'em you won't come at all. They might all quit me for that fellow who dances at Sydenham's. What's got you scared? Your foreign accent is immense. They'll never tumble." Then to her objection: "Aw—those books are the bunk!"

But Rosa had all the respect of the ignorant for the printed word. It is very doubtful if she would have gone at all had not Dunkerley told her the entrance to the tea-room was draped with heavy portières and she might stand outside behind one of the pillars of the promenade—which was dark—there observing the quality of his pupils without her presence being known to them. “You might do *that* before you throw down about fifteen hundred for your share—there’ll be three thousand gross if they keep coming until the Newport season starts. But if *you* don’t show up . . .”

His deep gloom decided her. His expert assumption of platonic friendship was wearing down her defenses. She had now gone so far as to concede that “if it wasn’t she never could love *anybody* again.” Now that he was surrounded by the fascinators who had stolen her Adonis—Aramis, her defects would be more noticeable to him: she must make up for this by additional good behavior: stubbornness was fatal to friendship. And the thought of her loneliness, if she lost him, brought sudden tears. Those damned women!

Such thoughts drove her to the theater one spring morning, having lingered an hour or more before her mirror making sure her toilet showed none of those sartorial solecisms that gave the scornful heroines of her novels such chances for amused contempt when speaking of stage women.

She drove to the theater in a taxi, and stole past the stage doorkeeper like one intending dressing-room burglary. The curtain was down, the front of the house black. She stumbled twice, but the soft carpet did not betray her. Then with all the caution of a mouse in a strange kitchen, she approached some stray gleams of light and the sound of piano-playing. It was several minutes before she equipped herself with sufficient nerve to peep.

The familiar sight of turkey trotting greeted her. Dun-

kerley was whirling about with a young thing in violet velour. Rosa was glad to note that society women had legs like other people—these had never been mentioned in the novels. But she was somewhat surprised that shocked comment did not arise on all sides when, doing the “dip,” a long black silken stocking was exposed to the knee, revealing to the shocked watcher a habit she associated only with such as her former friends: she herself had long ceased to carry her money there. And, as the couple whirled past the door, she began to wonder if there were not some mistake, if some chorus girl had not slipped in; for the young thing’s lips were daintily painted, her eyes were much too concentrically framed not to have had the assistance of a second soft pencil.

Rosa shifted the gaze to the others: a dozen or more débutantes, older girls, one matron. All had employed similar subterfuges in the matter of complexion; while the cheeks of most had not escaped some semi-liquid paste, well enough rubbed in to deceive men, maybe, but not women. Nor did they sit in those conventional and dignified attitudes her books had led her to expect: the majority had their legs crossed, and, in a season of tight skirts, that necessitated, before wearing, a careful inspection of silk stockings for suspected runs. No wonder they had not been shocked when those young knees had come into evidence. And, although it is true the novels had made some shamefaced mention of female cigarette-smoking, one inferred it a bit of daredeviltry excused by its excessive daintiness; but here were old hands for all their young faces. Not that it wasn’t worse to see that stout chaperon with a thick Egyptian hanging from her lower lip.

Rosa was suddenly reminded of a heavy dissipated Spanish woman who had made her flattering offers: who came late with some of her girls. True, these young ladies who sat sprawling along the cushioned seats were slenderer, wore

simpler clothes and fewer colors; but, with their attitudes of Oriental indolence and careless display of nether limbs, the cigarettes drooping from the fingers of several, the sensuous syncopated tune and the Barbary Coast dance, the scene seemed very similar to one of the visits of the Spanish woman to the dance-hall. . . .

Of course, the conversation would be different, however. Rosa reproached herself for allowing her envy and dislike to make so ridiculous a comparison.

And then the man at the piano ceased playing at Dunkerley's order.

"You see—like this," he added to the young thing in violet, and began gravely to go through certain steps. "Isn't she the baby *elephant*?" commented another young thing in garnet. "Don't you think trotting is too deevy for *words*?" remarked a third. "Don't you perfectly *adore it*, Paula? Yesterday we trotted at Mrs. Paletot's tea, and at the Ogden-Trompers' dinner-dance. Anybody who didn't *trot* might just as well *die*. I had *three* with Olly Case—"

"Isn't he just the handsomest thing in the whole *world*?" demanded Paula eagerly. "I could just leave my happy *home* for *him* if anybody was to step right up and *ask you*. And aren't you just crazy about the way he *dances*? Just like a perfectly good *Annarovna*! Oh, no; that's the *woman*, isn't it? *What's* the man's name?"

"Mikhailowitch, you mean, my dear?" asked the puffy chaperon woman. "I suppose I *ought* to rave, oughtn't I? But give me a good Garden show *every time*. I've been *four times* to the *new* one. Have you noticed that perfectly good skunk-trimmed *seal sacque* that little French *devil's* wearing in the *Maxim's* scene? Isn't it a *scandal* such creatures should beat us to the smartest *things*?"

"They say Olly Case has one of those persons in love with

him—that other dancing woman—what's her *name*? Two thousand a *week*, my dear. Anyhow, Molly Legay paid Madame Ondit, so Olly must have *someone*. I wonder when Govvy Legay will see through a perfectly good pane of *glass*?" . . .

The young thing in violet velour, whose place with Dunkerley had been taken by another, now joined them, breathing exhaustedly: "My God! Give me a *cigarette*, Lou. What's that about Govvy Legay? He got me in a corner at the Orrin's *conservatory* the other *night* and nearly tore the dress off my *back*. He's just a low *brute*." "You shouldn't meet him for tea in one of Christophe's private *rooms* then, my dear," advised an even younger thing who had an aureole of sunny hair and wide-open blue eyes. "That's your Orrin *Conservatory*!"

"Don't *you* talk, miss," returned Mr. Legay's detractor significantly. "How could anybody know *who* was in a Christophe room unless they were on the same *floor*? There's more than *one* perfectly good private room, you know." . . .

The puffy woman was seized with a fit of sudden chuckling. "Have you heard the latest about Jean Garnier's place?" she asked. "Well, *listen*. You know how you *young people* will slip out at these big *crushes*? And get back only in time to go home with your *chaperons*?" There was a chorus of instant denial. "What a *shocking old woman* you are, Mrs. Delehanty!" said the girl in garnet. At the accusation of antiquity the puffy-faced chaperon pricked up her ears maliciously. "Who was in a rowdy *restaurant* with a man's *coat* on last *Christmas Eve*?" she inquired of Miss Garnet. "It's a low-down lie," muttered the accused sulkily.

"But I was telling you about Jean Garnier's *restaurant*. The last Canary cotillion, a taxi drove up, and a man with a waiter's *overcoat* and a two-dollar *derby*, both borrowed,

comes running up the *stairs* and rings the *bell*. 'I *can't* give you a private room, Mr. So-and-So,' says Garnier. 'You've *got* to, man,' says So-and-So. 'I've got one of the *débutantes* in that *taxi*.' 'What's *that*?' says that disrespectful old Garnier. 'I've got one of the *débutantes* in *every one* of *my rooms*.'" . . .

None of the listeners thought it wise to refrain from laughing loudly lest the narrator's little suspicious eyes be turned upon them. And the laugh was echoed from the promenade outside. But it was not at the story but at the months she had wasted training for Master Moncure. In that moment Rosa knew subconsciously, what the Chinese learned ages ago: that when women are mere creatures for men's physical appetites, social position makes no difference; which is why a Chinese noblewoman marrying a coolie, or a coolie's daughter marrying a nobleman, each takes her husband's rank; for theirs is a mere change of conditions, not of character.

So Rosa realized why it is so necessary for a woman's clothes to be correct to the smallest detail: outside a certain intonation easily acquired, they are her only real badge of rank. . . . And confident in both, she pushed aside the draperies and stepped into the room. "Good-morning, Mr. Dunkerley," she said unconcernedly. She was no longer afraid; for she knew that if she remembered her accent she need guard neither her speech nor her actions any more than she had done on the Bowery.

That night she asked Dunkerley to see her home, and at the door of her apartment-house, when he would have said good-night, she let him know by some subtle intonation that the image of Moncure had been cast down from its shrine and she was now desirous of assistance in trampling on it.

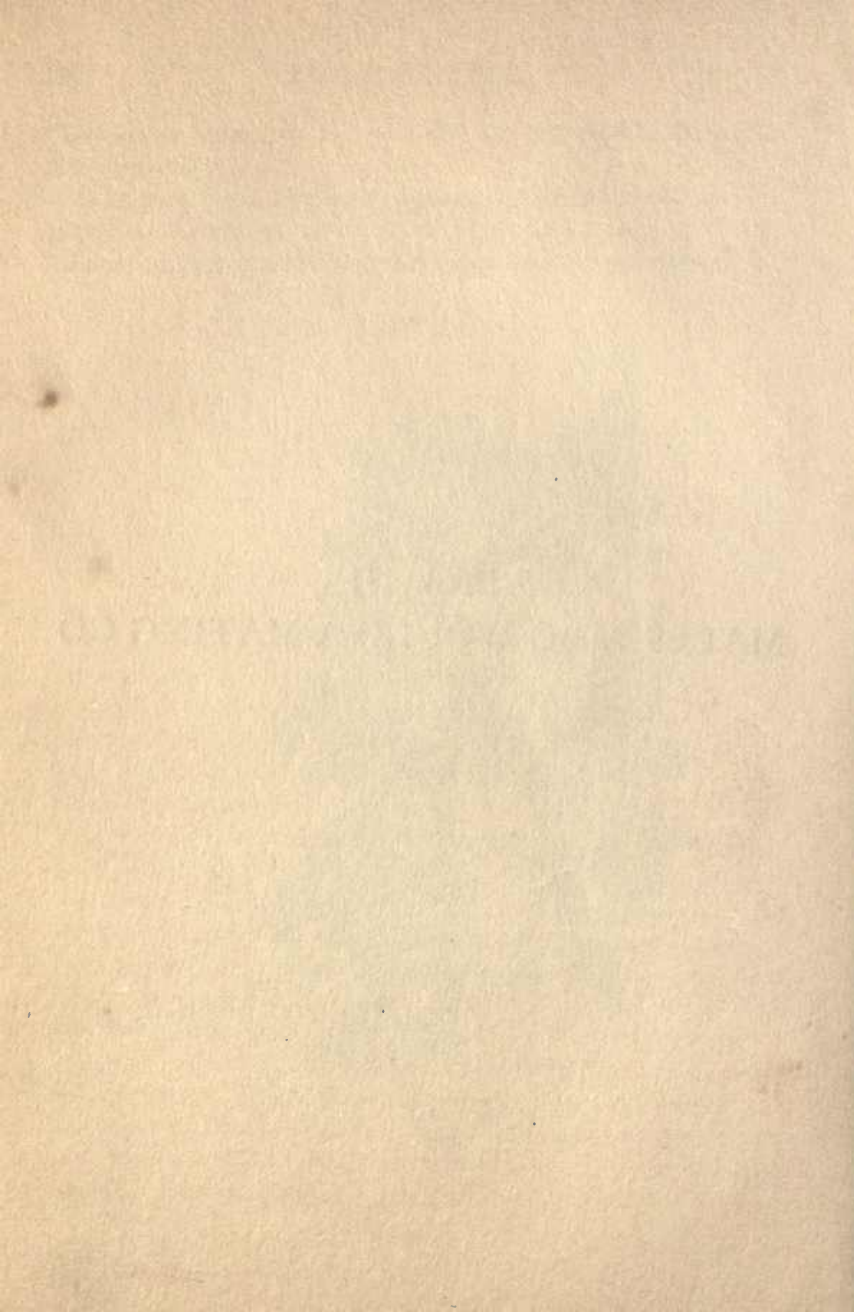
"You never come up like you did on the road," she said, prettily petulant. . . .

The next week, Dunkerley's name was added to that list of apartment-lessees in which hers figured; but his unofficial residence in the apartment-house dated back a full seven days.



Book III

MALES WHO WOULD A-MATING GO



BOOK III

MALES WHO WOULD A-MATING GO

I. THE AMATEUR BOHEMIAN



HARLES LESTER LINTHICUM was one of many who claim that conventions appall their free and vibrant natures, but would as soon be seen without pants as wearing a turn-over collar with a dress-coat, or a stock in the city. His insistent claim to Bohemianism was founded principally on the fact that he gave little dinners in his studio attended by women, who, accustomed to liveried footmen handing plates and butlers filling glasses, said it was "too quaint" to be served by Linthicum's man unassisted, and to meet others of Linthicum's profession—writing fellows whom Linthicum treated with an overdone familiarity.

Linthicum first injected himself into the life of Broadway as a dramatic reviewer for a weekly founded at his own suggestion by young Harrington James, a person with too large an income to spend unaided by skilled assistants. *Broad-*

way *Brummel* was to fill a long-felt want. Being endowed, it sought not popular favor, but was to be a magic glass through which all mundane affairs were to be seen from the standpoint of the upper class. Society, polo, yachting, motoring, aviation and the stage—chiefly it had to do with these. A foreign visitor reading this agreeable periodical, and this only, must have imagined the United States in no way dissimilar to the United Kingdom. Its chronicles bore to actualities no greater relation than the tales of Hans Christian Andersen. And of all the necromancing goose quills in its service, none surpassed that of Charles Lester Linthicum. His stories of the mimic world were those of a glorified society reporter. Legitimate actresses gave high teas and receptions and conducted themselves generally like leaders of fashion. Soubrettes became playful, frolicsome débutantes. Show girls seemed to him as the swans must have looked to the ugly duckling. Here, indeed, was the fairy world of enchantment which youngsters anticipate while the orchestra crashes out the overture; the gay, yet innocent, life of a *matinée* girl's dream; the land to which music wafts the imaginative, and where they remain, alas, only so long as the music lasts.

II

STAGE folk put on their Sunday best faces for Linthicum. Pellucid as he was, a person soon learned what he wanted one to be, and to be that one was amazing easy for mimes, accustomed for four hours, and twice a week eight, to play other parts than the ones assigned them by Mother Nature. He learned that most show-girls were from the South, and, had it not been for the war, would be presiding at the ancestral tea-urn.

Those lacking unlucky ante-bellum ancestors seemed to have crowded the convents of the North, and he had yet to meet one without some claim to distinguished relatives and careful bringing up.

"Be careful, Lottie, you're laying it on too thick."

"What—with this mark?" Carlotta had whispered back. "Say, take it from me, he'll stand for *anything*."

It was on the occasion of Carlotta's first meeting with Linthicum, and she had been telling him how distasteful it was for a sweet, refined girl to wear tights—Lottie, whose limbs had been paragraphed more than infrequently, and who, like the girl in the comedian's story, got thirty-five dollars a week for "Hip, hip, hurray"—thirty-four dollars and ninety-nine cents for the two "hips." The remainder of the story of Lottie's early life her friend had allowed to pass in silent disapproval, but, as she afterward phrased it in telling the incident in the dressing-room, "Lottie's work was raw as a Lynnhaven on the half-shell." At which Lottie, making up at a far corner of the long dressing-room, looked over and grinned mischievously.

"Well, I got away with it, didn't I? What's the use of thinking up good stuff for a mark like that? I spotted him right away as the kind who says, 'No matter what they are, I always treat them as I'd treat Mrs. Astor. They appreciate it, poor souls.'"

Lottie's imitation of a gentlemanly young wine-dispenser proved that better things than chorus work were waiting for her in the near future when her opportunity to "make good" should come. Of her talents Lottie was well aware; her lack of opportunity she deplored, but, with the confidence and sanguinity of children of the Nightless Lane, waited for it to come, and did the best she could in the front row. She was never out of an engagement, for she was on Bob Ledyard's books. Lottie was what he called a "good worker,"

being dependent on her wages and therefore not apt to come late in a taxicab with a frayed excuse.

Lottie never went to gay supper-parties in private dining-rooms: firstly, because she hated the half-ceremonious, half-contemptuous treatment of that kind of men; secondly, because she preferred to choose her company, unless she was penniless; and thirdly, for the reason that she believed that some day her name would be in electric letters, and she did not want young bucks to be entitled to say languidly that they had "had her out" when she was one of the spear-carriers. After the theater, she liked to be with the company manager, the librettist or composer, the press agent, some song writers, some vaudevillians and some other girls in a party and listen to the men talk "shop," occasionally putting in an apt phrase, which caused those gentlemen to give her sharp looks and to invite her out again. Several times she had love affairs with librettists, both resulting in lines for her to say, and, in the last instance, an understudy. She was now generally known as a "line girl" (one to be trusted with "bits," and an understudy if necessary), but this present engagement necessitated voices of grand-opera caliber for the understudies, so her chance had been deferred.

This night, as she turned matters over in that busy little brain of hers, she decided to make much of Charles Lester Linthicum. Her former experience with authors had taught her the jargon of the writing clan, a little of which she had used to good effect on Linthicum during their brief dinner talks; but, of course, she understood she must treat him far differently from the librettists.

Some sixth sense told Lottie that Linthicum would be waiting for her that night; and, as she stepped past the door-keeper, a taxi-driver proved her prophecy by handing her a note on the paper of a smart supper place; a note that apologized for Linthicum's absence, pleading a lack of desire

to be classed as a stage-door Johnnie, and would she take the taxicab and join him? At supper she coruscated. She said all of the usual things about how musical shows have deteriorated since Gilbert and Sullivan; how horseplay has taken the place of real wit—and various other stock statements she had heard her literary friends make when their wits were dull and they must say something to pass the time.

She had the opportunity of saying later to a timid proposal in a taxicab:

"Mr. Linthicum, if I wanted a furnished apartment of my own I could have had one long, long ago. Yes, and if I'd taken it, I wouldn't be in the chorus. With my voice and looks, I might be getting part of my pay in 'three sheets' now, my face on every bill-board in New York. But—"

It required some courage to finish the sentence. Lottie, who had a hothouse sense of humor— However, a long breath and she managed it:

"I'm not that kind of a girl, Mr. Linthicum."

"I'm glad—I'm awfully glad," Linthicum had burst out, and then, as her eyes looked astonished inquiry, he blundered on apologetically: "You see, they're always trying to make out you stage girls are so—so—well, you know. Simply looking for a man to—er—assist them—almost *any* man. And I liked you so much to-night—you're so different—I was determined I'd find out before I got to care too much about you. For I do care, Lottie. You don't mind me calling you 'Lottie'—"

She had withdrawn her hand gently.

"No, I don't mind *that*," she said in her purest tones. "But you mustn't talk about caring for me—we girls hear too much of that. And you say I'm different—I thought *you* were different, too, or I shouldn't have gone to supper with you."

He drove away from the apartment-hotel where she lived wildly intoxicated by "the perfume of her presence"—four

dollars a bottle and used a drop at a time. Here was the right sort of girl—Bohemian, a good pal, could understand a man's work, not mercenary, and as straight as his own sister. (We copy the Linthicum verbiage.) *She* sat, fully dressed, for some time, thinking. Here was a man—money, position, and best of all, influence with the managers. *Broadway Brummel* was the directory of the swagger crowd so far as amusements were concerned; and he was *Broadway Brummel* in so far as it concerned the theatrical world. Her cue was merely to read up on things likely to interest him, be “not that kind of girl,” and tell him that he must prove that he really cared as he said he did—make her learn to care for him by helping her to attain her ambitions; a “not that kind of a girl” girl had too small a chance with managers' pets and authors' pets and—

Authors' pet! She was seized with sudden alarm. Whereupon she sat down and hastily indited a letter, enjoining secrecy. “It is all over now, and I've met someone whom I care for, and who wouldn't look on things the way we do.” The envelope bore the name of a well-known librettist.

III

UP to this period, Lottie had been as are countless other pretty denizens of the Nightless Lane. She crammed her feet into a modicum of toe, and slanted them upward at an angle of forty-five degrees until her heels rested on three or four inches of hard leather—“short vamp” shoes the profession called them; her stockings cost half a dollar and were silk only to the knees, for she economized on every other article of apparel to buy new and attention-compelling headgear.

Soon after Linthicum's entry into her life, one would have picked her out of any Broadway crowd and wondered

what she was doing away from Fifth Avenue. In tailored clothes, relieved from mannishness by soft jabots and cuffs, in simple hats with a single quill or feather, her hair arranged girlishly instead of twisted onto the current coiffure, Lottie looked like Linthicum's sister—which was what Linthicum aimed at. This metamorphosis effected, he smuggled her into unimportant teas and parties given by the smart "Bohemian" world, where foregathered well-known English actors, the better class of literary and artistic folk who are comfortable in dress clothes, and a sprinkling of those of the *Social Register*. Lottie listened, picked up their patter, learned to enunciate her words after the English fashion, learned to deplore the fact that ladies and gentlemen did not go on the stage here in America as they do in England and discovered that one who devoted a life to the amassing of money was to be despised and rejected by all real people.

Lottie looked upon all this as a clever child looks on schooling: hating the school and the masters, but realizing the necessity of the education. After such an afternoon, what a relief to get to the dressing-room and give imitations for her companion coryphées of those she had met; how refreshing to have the comedian put a careless arm around her waist and kiss her if he felt so inclined, not because he cared anything for her, but because her kind of people were affectionate and undignified, not always thinking of what was "good form"; to go, afterward, if some lucky chance kept Linthicum engaged elsewhere, to some little café where ragtime singers and dancers twirled and snapped their fingers, looking admiringly at her when the words happened to refer to a "beautiful doll" or a "wonderful girl." At such times she would grow excited and her pretty eyes would light up, and when she danced with some man of her party and his hand closed on hers, her little fingers would clasp it more tightly. Such men called her "honey child" and "dear" at their first meet-

ing, and it was not necessary for her to pretend to be anything except what she was when she was with them; they liked her because she was their little playmate, Lottie, and they made love to her as they made love to all their little playmates; but a single word warned them and the love-making ended without ill feeling, and, with equal cheerfulness and sincerity, the man made love to the girl on the other side of him. That is, unless the girl in question happened to be the sweetheart of a friend—in which case the men were as scrupulously careful as though the pair were married.

A queer little world with unwritten laws more binding than any in the statute books—a world that ceases to be at the entrance of an alien who would not understand. A tolerably well-behaved world, too, a cheerful, hard-working world that takes nothing seriously except “getting on.”

IV

IN this world, then, Lottie met Tommy Hartsell. Tommy was what his companions called a “bar-room comedian,” which is to say that he made everybody laugh except the public. True, he had not tried very hard to make the public laugh; for, so far, he had produced only lyrics for such songs as were demanded of him by his contract with his publishers. Tommy would sit up half the night composing some bit of local wit and cleverness which could amuse only those of a very limited circle; while to the work that brought him a scanty livelihood, because he did so little of it, he gave only the time absolutely necessary, taking his “dummy lyric” after a tune had been composed and writing in its place, almost as swiftly as another would write prose, some jingles that served its purpose well enough, but not any too well. To

make a tableful of companions hold their sides with laughter was Tommy's chief ambition.

He took no women seriously, cared for them as a sex, giving none more than another, ready for an affair with any pretty one who fancied him first, but never exposing himself to defeat by making advances unless sure they were acceptable. A byword for fickleness, he promptly deserted any sweetheart after a month or so, and was so busy getting new ones that, at twenty-nine, he was in the same chronic state of pecuniary embarrassment he had inherited from a devil-may-care father.

Tommy carried a notebook in which he jotted down much useless information; among which was the number of times women had said to him: "You act the way you do because you've never been in love; some day you'll meet THE woman, and she'll give you what you've given others. Then you'll know how it feels."

When Lottie added herself to the others who had made this remark, Tommy gravely inscribed her name, informing her that she was the three hundred and sixty-fifth.

"The most beautiful trait in women—to me," added Tommy, "is their affection for Thompson Hartsell. Until one of them has this wonderful trait, no matter how otherwise wonderful she is, I cannot become interested in her."

"That's because you're not a *real* man!" Lottie said scornfully.

"Like 'old lady Linthicum,' for instance?" he suggested mildly.

"If you were only half the man he is—" she said elliptically.

"I'd be listening to you repeat word for word things you've read and don't understand. Lottie, don't let that solemn ass make you forget that the first duty of pretty little girls like yourself is to be highly ornamental and inconsequentially

joyous. You're a frank little pagan, and as a worshiper of Dionysus—I adore you."

She forgot her pose long enough to ask him who Dionysus was; he sounded like the sort of person an acquaintance with whom was likely to impress Linthicum.

"Well—I'm a Dionysian and so are you—because our pleasures are the natural results of untrammelled natures; while a hard-working business man out to make a night of it once or twice a week, drinking too much and taking his pleasures coarsely, is a Bacchanalian. Dionysus and Bacchus are—supposititiously—the same god—but, oh, what a difference in the morning!"

"It isn't as though you were a *real* man," Lottie persisted, because it seemed to be the only insult he could not answer. "You conceited thing! I wouldn't like to buy you at your own valuation."

"You could get me awful cheap," said Tommy. "As a matter of fact, I'm not much good any way you look at it. But it shall never be said of the last of the Hartsells that he was a polisher of peanuts."

His meaning eluded her, but the phrase won him a laugh.

"It's impossible to take *you* seriously," said Lottie. "What do you mean by polishing peanuts?"

"Plays—novels—short stories—poems—librettos—lyrics—any form of popular writing to-day—peanuts," returned Mr. Thompson Hartsell, for so he must be called when his eyes lose their merry spark and he ceases to be Pierrot and becomes philosopher. "Everything is sacrificed to-day to the tastes of the middle class. A play or a novel, even a foolish lyric such as I write, must have a kernel that is tasteful to the *bourgeoisie*, and, since peanuts are the most *bourgeois* of nuts—peanuts! Thompson Hartsell will polish no peanuts for you."

Contrasting this superior attitude, which left him poor and

unknown, with the serious attitude Charles Lester Linthicum observed toward his work—as though it were some sacred lamp burning in a barren waste—Carlotta wondered. To her, as to most people, plays produced for two dollars a seat and books published at one dollar and a half a copy were first class; others second, third, fourth and fifth rate according to the price people paid to see or to read them. That Linthicum was first class she had not doubted, while people of whom the public had never heard—like Hartsell—were naturally inferior intellects. Now their positions seemed reversed; for Linthicum stooped to take seriously the people that Hartsell despised.

“In so utilitarian a country as ours, few ever come to a realization that thoughts are actual existent things, the uses to which they are put only secondary,” Hartsell went on, as though reading her mind. “Real philosophy lives while second-rate deeds die. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle are alive to-day for what they were, and influence the lives of the seekers of knowledge, while there is meat in the popular plays of Aristophanes only for the antiquarian and the snuffy scholar.”

He broke off with his usual laugh. “Reads just like a four-dollar subscription book, eh? Let’s be Dionysians again,” he said, and kissed her. He did it with force, almost with brutality, for when he talked as he had just done (which was seldom nowadays) he felt a great bitterness for the unknowing, unthinking world that placed no value on the treasures of the mind unless a spade and pickaxe unearthed the treasures and made them salable.

His action so masterful, withal, so careless of her own wishes and desires, thrilled Lottie, and from that moment, whether he wanted her or not—and she was not sure he did—she was his. But she gave no indication of this surrender

beyond an instinctive return of his caress, for which she hated herself a second later.

"Don't be foolish," she said, referring to his action. "I like to hear you talk like that, Tommy. I do hate people not to be serious with me and talk about serious things."

V

As a direct result of this conversation, the great Charles Lester Linthicum decided to write a libretto.

For, from the moment Lottie fell in love with Tommy Hartsell, she forgot her own plans for advancement through Linthicum, and thought only how she could influence that most popular of all the best sellers to act as the god in the car for the proper recognition of Thompson Hartsell by a benighted public. Thus may we follow the somewhat devious workings of the young lady's mind:

"Of course I know Tommy is wonderful because I have a much better brain than most people, but the public doesn't know it; and when I am very famous I don't want people to have to ask: 'Who is that man with her?' I want them to say: 'Isn't that a good pair—the famous Carlotta Alleyne and the famous Thompson Hartsell.'

"And though Tommy may despise the public and the kind of work they admire, still he has just got to be brought to do something to be heard of. Charlie Linthicum loves the ground I walk on, so if I tell him he's the only man in the world who can write me the sort of part I can shine in, why Charlie will just do it, and I will suggest Tommy for writing the lyrics; and if I insist Charlie will insist, and the managers will have to like the libretto and lyrics and have music written for them, because Charlie's influence is too great for them to offend him—and besides, his name will be

a great advertisement. And I will have him insist that there be a clause in the contract that no one else shall be permitted to rewrite any of the piece except the authors, and, of course, when the piece goes into rehearsals almost everything Charlie writes will be cut out because he doesn't understand musical shows; and because of that clause in the contract, Tommy will have to rewrite it or close the show, and that will prove to the managers what Tommy can do; and then, when they come to him begging him to write shows, instead of him being too proud to beg them, as he is now, he will write them and be famous."

Which, on the whole, was a remarkable piece of synthesis for a young woman in the chorus.

The idea of the libretto having had a second birth in the brain of Mr. Charles Lester Linthicum, he hastened to the nearest manager and propounded the same. It was received cordially, for managers are ever alert for the famous recruit from Bookland, having heard much of the Gilbert-Messiah who is some day to appear; but the suggestion of Mr. Hartsell as a collaborator was frowned upon, the manager having lost the admiration of a young lady of whom he was fond through allowing Tommy to interpolate a number into a last-season show.

"Unreliable; *might* turn out *one* good feature number, but *sure* to come across with *six* lemons. Hartsell's been dubbing around here for years; had all the chances in the world, but all he's good for is to fill Dithmar's catalogue with shop-counter sheet music. Get a live one, Mr. Linthicum."

But the indefatigable Lottie had borrowed from Tommy various slips of frayed typewriting that he carried in his pockets and read to select assemblies of friends, and a man like Linthicum would recognize what the managers could not, the touch of the true artist. So he insisted on Hartsell and carried his point. Later the contract was shown to Nathan

Morris, the firm's indispensable play doctor, who administered physic to shows about to leave "the road" for New York, and who carefully indexed every joke, situation and bright line he read in newspapers, foreign magazines and translations for possible use in the future.

"You signed a contract for an amateur and a lunatic to write your summer *revue* that's got to go into rehearsal in a month, and you let 'em get a clause in that their work wasn't to be fixed up by me—I think you must be dippy, too."

"But think of the free advertisement Linthicum's name gives us—the first play by a man who writes a 'best seller' a year," chimed in the press agent. "Why, it'll be good for a column in every newspaper in the country. You know the stuff: 'It looks as though the old days of comic opera are returning when such men as Mr. Blank Blankety Blank, the author of "Sin and the Seventeen Sinners," that masterpiece of caustic *causerie*, turn their hands to work hitherto unfortunately given over to managers' hacks.' That happens whenever anybody but a regular librettist gets into the game, and Linthicum is the biggest fish in the literary pond."

"Yes, but who's to do the work, with that silly contract about nobody else working on the book?" howled Morris. "Hartsell—who thinks musical shows are a joke—who 'kids' his own stuff all the time? And who is this girl, Carlotta Alleyne, you've signed away a principal part to?"

"Oh, Lottie Allen? She's all right," answered the manager, brightening up. "She went on in May's place in 'The Princess' at a Wednesday 'mat,' and I always intended to do something for her, but forgot."

VI

THIS is the story of how near to being right the play doctor was.

Linthicum read the "book" one Monday morning on the Garden stage, with the members of the cast drawn up in a semicircle around him: on one side of his table Tommy Hartsell, yawning intermittently; on the other, with a face of ghostly calm, the great Bob Ledyard, who had been engaged at five hundred a week to stage the production. Ledyard, after the first few pages, did not dare to raise his eyes for fear of meeting those of the "principals." In his opinion no play could be a success unless producer and cast believed in it, and if any of the cast looked at him until he had recovered from his shock, they would know *he* began without faith.

Every now and then he stole a glance at the sleek and satisfied novelist, as he rambled on with discursive dialogue, pink-tea witticisms and perverted puns. Whenever a character, not a gentleman, was introduced, it was to the accompaniment of a weird dialect—Bowery characters speaking of "blokes" and "toffs" as Whitechapel folk do; a negro making use of the adjective "mighty" every second speech and addressing everyone as "boss"; the comedy of a society climber, a woman, lying almost entirely in Malapropisms and barbarous misuse of a few simple French phrases; and the two comedians—there is no language in vogue in any modern country which could even dimly describe the two comedians' parts.

The people of the stage are polite, and always make it a point to laugh whenever their author seems to lay comic stress on a sentence; moreover, they are easy to amuse; but in this case, they stopped straining themselves after the first

act. All gazed inquiringly at Bob Ledyard, who, by this time master of himself, stared back in cold surprise.

"I will take the principals at one o'clock sharp," he said, when Linthicum closed the neatly bound script of "The Parisians." "No questions until then, please.

"I was going to take you people now," said Ledyard to the others. "But something I didn't anticipate has come up, so I must run down to Mr. Mandelbaum's office. Mr. Schanze will teach you the opening chorus while I'm gone."

No one knew he was referring to the libretto as the unanticipated matter except Lottie, and, possibly Hartsell, lounging over by the piano beside the composer, Schanze, who wore a look of blank dismay. Ledyard clapped on his hat, caught up his coat and ran out of the stage entrance to his motor car, where sat already enthroned Miss Carlotta Alleyne.

"What d'you want, Lottie?" he asked in a displeased tone.

"The book was terrible, wasn't it? Oh, don't look at me like that, Mr. Ledyard—you know you're going down to the office to have Nat Morris get to work rewriting it, aren't you? But it won't do any good—there's a clause in the contract preventing it."

As the car tore down Broadway, she outlined the situation briefly.

The car halted before Mandelbaum's office.

"Just a moment, Mr. Ledyard—I want to help you. There's nothing in the contract to prevent Thompson Hartsell from rewriting the book; and he's clever, awfully clever—he can do just what you want. And I ought to know. I've been on your books long enough—worked for you in four productions—to know what you want."

"The lyric-writer? He's never written a book; I've no time to waste on inexperienced people," Ledyard began disjointedly. Her calm, matter-of-fact assurance and absolute confidence puzzled him. She saw her advantage, and passed

to him the same frayed bits of typewriting carried so long in Hartsell's pocket, those which had already served her once in getting Linthicum to insist on Tommy's collaboration.

"Hartsell wrote those," she said simply.

No one but a brilliantly clever man could have done the fooling that Ledyard was now frowning over; work that represented much midnight electricity burnt for no reason than to amuse some theatrical dinner with hits in rhyme at the foibles and fancies of prominent people of their world; work too local to be understood by more than a few thousands.

"It doesn't say much for him, wasting his time like that," growled Ledyard.

"It proves he can do what's got to be done, doesn't it?" persisted Lottie with a woman's tenacity where the man she loves is concerned. "Listen, Mr. Ledyard: I'll get Mr. Linthicum to go away and stay away until the dress rehearsal. He's wanted in Newport and Bar Harbor, and he isn't wanted here. Meanwhile you get Mr. Hartsell to rewrite the book. Stand over him with a club and make him do it. Don't tell him it's for his own sake—to make a reputation or money or anything like that; tell him it's for you; as a friend, beg him to help you out. Make him help you shoulder the responsibility; take him home with you and lock him in a room, and don't let him out until he finishes an act. That's the only way, believe me; do that, and we'll have a success."

When she finished, breathless, Ledyard looked at her in silent amazement. As one of his "girls"—at whom he stormed and raved during rehearsals, but for whom he cherished an almost paternal regard, and saw to it that they always had work—he had regarded her as a promising child; he had been glad to see her promoted to a principal's part, a move he had himself recommended, but in the rôle of Little Miss Fix-It she was as yet a newcomer and had to be understood.

And she *made* him understand, right there on the Broad-

way curb, with hundreds of people both of them knew passing and repassing unrecognized. And Ledyard, being one of the people of behind the "back drop," found nothing to censure in this use of Linthicum to exalt Hartsell; for the lyric-writer and the girl were of his world, while for the self-satisfied amateur Bohemian he had only the contempt in which stage folk hold those who invade the country of rouge paws and pearl powder equipped with ammunition as defective as the script of "The Parisians" had proved to be.

"I'll speak to Mr. Mandelbaum about it," said Ledyard gruffly.

VII

LEDYARD was, at heart, as kindly a soul and as good a companion as lived, his air of sternness and manner of shouting when things went wrong at rehearsal being merely part of his system of discipline, which, on the first day, transformed any chorus he rehearsed into soldiers. For all of that, he permitted no one else, not even the managers for whom he worked, to speak harshly to his people or even *of* them. Hartsell had never known him personally until Ledyard asked him to lunch that day. Thereafter, in spite of Tommy's protests, he became as clay in the big fellow's hands; being managed as easily as Ledyard's actors and chorus people, although by a different system.

Lottie had found the flaw in Hartsell's armor. Contemptuous as he was of fame and fortune, he yet would do anything to win the plaudits of those he admired—among whom Ledyard soon figured. Moreover, Ledyard took the right viewpoint regarding the work to be done—that is, Hartsell's viewpoint.

"Of course all this business is utter rot—you know it and

I know it. But I've always had a fancy that if some fellow with a real sense of humor instead of a stage sense would pretend to take it seriously, and write a burlesque on men and things as they seem to him, we might have something new and successful. Take Swift for instance; his satire would make a gorgeous background for a musical show—'Gulliver' was just built for comic opera. Burlesque the old situations, giving them a new twist, so that when the public thinks it knows what it's going to get, it doesn't get it at all."

Hartsell became enthusiastic at once; but he did not know Ledyard was referring to work to be done in this particular show. When he discovered it, he flatly refused.

"I'm the lyric-writer, Mr. Ledyard," he said.

"But Linthicum's gone away, and we've got to have a show. Here I am sticking only because I've got faith in you pulling us out of this hole; are you going to be a quitter? Going to throw *me* down—and that company of a hundred people? Haven't you got any *heart*? Don't throw us down."

Hartsell wavered. Ledyard thrust the script into his hand, hurried him into a motor car and to his apartment; where he locked him in the library with a stenographer, tobacco and refreshments near at hand, an electric bell and a dumbwaiter. Then he went back to his chorus.

In a spirit of mad resentment at having this work forced upon him, Tommy Hartsell carefully made a list of every scene of physical and "prop" comedy that he had seen wring shouts of laughter from benighted audiences; also every stock line of the "humorists" and the vaudeville comics. Having satisfied himself that he had exhausted the resources of his memory on these subjects, he lighted a cigar and told the expectant stenographer he was ready to begin.

He dictated rapidly, but all the while building a structure out of his fifty-seven "sure-fire laughs" and situations; a structure which, while enabling him to use the stuff he despised

in slightly different clothes, allowed also fierce fun to be made of it and those who thought it admirable. The stenographer missed his flights of satire, but was so continually amused by the misfortunes of the comedians that she had many times to stop him until she could recover breath lost by laughing at situations that were old when the world was new—primitive physical comedy. Not once, however, did she titter at his Swiftian rapier thrusts at moth-eaten ideals and idols; which increased Hartsell's bitterness to such an extent that, as he went on, there was less and less of the Juvenal and more and more of the Autolycus predominant. He rang his first-act curtain down with a situation that before the slight change he made in it had done duty since Sheridan's time. It rendered the stenographer helpless with mirth.

"I'll bet this show is a great success," she said cordially. "I never laughed so much in my life."

"Give it to Mr. Ledyard when you're through," said Hartsell. It was dusk now, and Ledyard came in answer to his ringing, and let him out when he heard the first act was finished.

"Well?" asked the producer.

The stenographer burst into eulogy.

"That's the kind of thing that counts," said Ledyard, linking his arm in Hartsell's after giving the stenographer instructions to have script and "parts" typed by the morning. "The little 'steno' there—she's an average sample of the public—if you made *her* laugh you can make them *all* laugh and there's a fortune waiting for you, my boy."

Immediately he was sorry he had said it.

"Sooner than make a fortune that way, by prostituting every mite of talent I have, I'd rather be a bum," said Hartsell hotly.

It was some time before Ledyard could persuade him to go on with the second act. It was written the following day

in about the same time and in the same manner, except that as the play progressed the satire entirely disappeared. Just before the final curtain, however, Hartsell introduced the character of a soured dramatic critic, who said of what Hartsell had written just what that sort of a critic was likely to say—certainly no critic could say more.

Even with this Ledyard was delighted.

"It's great," said Ledyard with an air of finality. "It's the surest-fire show I ever rehearsed. Now all I ask of you is to stick around at rehearsals, and make little changes here and there for song cues and 'front' scenes as we may require them—"

"*All* you ask!" Hartsell laughed harshly. "To sit around and listen to that stuff, and have people know I wrote it?"

"But *they* think you're great," said Ledyard. "And you are."

VIII

It is permitted to few of the world to know that in this life of ours there is no real tragedy, except the tragedy of extreme poverty where babies die in the hot summer for want of a nickel's worth of ice; and the tragedy of the maimed, the blind, the disfigured or congenitally weak. Outside of these terribly actual things, all other tragedy is fictitious, largely the result of a lack of introspection or sense of humor. As civilization progresses a realization of this fact becomes general, and the heroes of drama become comic figures, chasing the limelight. We exchange a "Silver King" with his "My God! Me own child!" for a "Devil's Disciple" who insists that he has a right to commit a bit of melodramatic bravado which threatens him with the rope without having the excuse tagged onto it that he did it for love of the wife of the man

he saved; and, not being able to have her—the old dramatists would explain—sacrificed his own life to make her happy with the man she *did* love.

"I *didn't* do it for that reason," exclaims Dick Dudgeon unhappily. "I don't know *why* I did it!" But those in the secret of life know he did because the human animal likes to be dramatic at night and regret it in the morning.

All this by way of prelude to a little sentimental bosh that Thompson Hartsell played for himself on the night of finishing his version of "The Parisians." All through his reading of the second act to the company he had been interrupted by gales of laughter, even from the comedians, who, as a rule, make it a point to impress on the author that they tickle the public's risibles not because of the *lines he wrote* but because they are *themselves*. Ledyard stood by, glowing, and Lottie smiled a proud, glad smile. She was the first to congratulate him.

"Tommy, it's sensational! It's sure fire; it's great—the funniest show I ever heard. I knew you had it in you."

Tommy snarled.

She became instantly conscious of her error, but it was too late to retrieve. However, she tried.

"Of course this kind of work isn't worthy of you. But it's a stepping stone to bigger things. Now that the managers know you can write, it will give them confidence in you; don't you see?"

"I do see," he returned with deliberate scorn. "I see that I've sunk to doing what I've ridiculed others for. I've written consummate balderdash—utter rot—absolute piffle. I'm no better than a woman of the streets; I'm worse, because the mind is more sacred than the body. I've lost my self-respect. And that's what you call 'great'!"

He turned toward the stage door. But he was not allowed to escape so easily. The stars of the show had been waiting

impatiently to congratulate him also; and Mandelbaum, the manager, who had been listening to the reading from the dark auditorium, took charge of him afterward, led him to his club and told him a contract for the book and lyrics of his next musical production would be waiting for him in his (Mandelbaum's) office on the morrow along with any reasonable amount of advance royalty he might desire.

"I don't know why you've been holding out on us so long," said the manager genially. "I've been looking for a man like you since I first started in business."

A success! Hartsell thought of this bitterly as he turned into an obscure café on a side street. He wanted to get drunk and forget his shame. It was late; Mandelbaum had insisted on dinner in a Fifth Avenue restaurant, and on much champagne; so that Hartsell was in that state of sentimental melancholy wherein men do foolish things. He wanted to drink himself into forgetfulness among strangers; hence he had wandered far from Curate's and similar rendezvous of the people of his kind. A failure, with the consciousness of great things within him, undone only because of a sick world, he had shone in such places, the undisputed king of the table, pouring out wit and satire for the appreciative. These expected from him some day a play or a book that would startle the world by almost supernormal cleverness, style, philosophy and wisdom. That he had not written it was only because he scorned to throw pearls before swine. His lyric-writing was a mere means of livelihood; they did not hold that against him, knowing he must eat; but to come before them with this sorry musical play—he, of all men!

Worst of all, in his heart of hearts, almost subconsciously, for he would not permit his brain to acknowledge the thought, he knew that the praise of "inferior people"—the performers and the manager for whom "The Parisian" was rewritten—was welcome to him, gratifying, actually warming. The horrible

suspicion persisted in forcing itself upon him that if his first work had been popular it might never have occurred to him that he was a superior person; doubtless he would have gone on trying to please the public and considering he had failed each time he did not, instead of taking as a criterion the ukase of those out of sympathy with the public's taste.

Strive to banish it as he would, another thought obtruded: that it would afford him pleasure to see thousands of mere people in ecstasies over his work, applauding violently and insisting on seeing him before the curtain. There would be good things result, too: a house in the country, a motor car, trips to Europe, a mind unworried by the need of petty cash. He could surround himself with beautiful things the better to be inspired. Then he laughed harshly again. To be inspired to what? To doing more twaddle of this sort? He needed nothing but a stenographer for that; the clangor of the city did not retard such puerile thought.

"But," something argued, "you can do one or two things like that, make money, and then settle down to do your real work." But he knew this was sophistry; that, once known and popular as the author of a certain sort of thing, one's thoughts and ambitions changed. One craved popularity as a true artist craves the praise of his peers. One needed luxury as a true artist needs the consciousness of good work well done.

He struck the table, attracting the attention of others in the room in which he sat, muttered an order to a waiter, and then told himself fiercely that he would be no such hack. Let Linthicum's name remain as author of the "book." He, Hartsell, would get an advance of royalty from Mandelbaum, refuse his other contract, and, away in London or Paris, live on what this piece would bring him and work steadily on the novel which, started a year before, still needed the devotion of as much time again before the critics of the *Athenæum*

and the French reviews would hail him as a master of realistic prose.

And what then? Some few thousand copies would be circulated among the elect in letters; some praise would be received from great writers whom he worshiped, and he would be back at lyric-writing again to make a living, pointed out by the theatrical world, his own world, as a man who "wrote one good show but didn't have it in him to follow it up." Poverty-stricken again while the mud from the wheels of popular writers' motor cars splashed his ready-made clothes, and, as he was to-day, the guest of luckier men whenever he ate in a decent restaurant. Worst of all—unknown except to a few scholars and critics until perhaps some fifty years hence when he would be "classic," if he had the courage to go on writing great books in poverty. Was it worth while?

IX

THE room in which he sat was long and low; and vines, flowers, grapes and apples covered its walls and ceilings, concealing the sources of light; an imitation of a Roman garden tawdry enough when done on a larger scale downtown, in this place absolutely distasteful to such as Hartsell in a normal frame of mind. Women sat singly and in couples at the little tables and welcomed masculine advances with seemingly perpetual smiles.

One of them paused on her entrance from the street at Hartsell's table, and, as he was too preoccupied to warn her off with a frown, she sat down. One of the waiters hurried to ascertain her pleasure. Hartsell made a bored motion with his hand, meaning, if such were the custom of the place, she might order as she liked, and told the man to bring him more whiskey.

"I'll have whiskey, too," said the girl.

The waiter eyed her, surprised. It is not the custom for girls who live by their wits, notwithstanding all the false reputation for revelry they have, to take anything stronger than water colored to represent *crème-de-menthe* and other drinks that can be sold at a quarter, one half of the price reverting to the girl in such places as this, and represented by a small brass check which the waiter hands them surreptitiously.

But the girl repeated her order sharply. On his way to the bar the waiter informed the proprietor that "Sophie's got the blues again; she's ordering red-eye."

"Make it half cold tea, then; she gets nasty right after her crying spells," directed the proprietor. "I suppose Joe's fell fer that crap game again and swung one on her from his heel."

In places of this type—the first cabarets in America and dubbed "honkatonks"—the waiters undertake also the duties of entertainers. They sing two types of songs: the first of the "twirling" type which says something about a "bear," or a "tuneful harmo-*nee*"; the second a species of sentimental ballad. One of the latter, full of tonsorial minors, began after Hartsell's unwelcome companion had swallowed her drink. Immediately the tears stood out in her eyes.

"I guess you despise me, don't you?" she began fiercely to the astonished writer. "But let me tell you if we was down in my home town you'd be glad—yes, and proud—to be seen sitting with me. You betcha you would."

"Look here," said Hartsell, amused out of his melancholy; "you're not going to pull that old one about if you weren't in this life half of Fifth Avenue would be calling on you?"

"Yes, and they would, too," she replied, dabbing at her eyes with an ornate but soiled handkerchief.

"What doing—leaving their laundry?" asked Hartsell, laughing.

She became violently unquotable (in print) but the lachrymose ballad was too much for her. She buried her face in her hands. "If you knew who I was you wouldn't talk thata way!" she sobbed. "Why, if I was to tell you my real name! If my mother knew I was in a place like this—my mother!"

The sentimental song ceased. Another singer began one of a different variety:

"Baby look-ahere, look-ahere, look-ahere."

Immediately the girl looked up and snapped her fingers.

"What is it, dear? What is it, dear?"

she chanted.

She forgot Hartsell for the hired dancer of the place, with whom she was soon swaying in the intricacies of the "Texas Tommy."

Hartsell paid his check. Outside it was a night of stars. He looked up at them, took a long breath, shook his head in wistful astonishment.

"I laughed at her; and I was doing the same sort of thing myself," he murmured. "Just the same sort of thing. There she was, self-proclaimed lady, regretting a life for which she was eminently suited. If she hadn't embraced it, she'd probably be making beds and sweeping floors. Here I am, self-proclaimed genius, regretting the first work I have ever done well enough to get any real pay for; whereas, if I hadn't done it, I probably would be writing hack lyrics all my life. The girl has by imagination and distance transformed the lower-middle-class home she came from into the house of a leading citizen; I have kidded myself into believing I am an embryo Balzac or de Maupassant. Our cases are

precisely similar—neither she nor I can prove it; if her pathos over her ‘wasted life’ is pathos, so is mine; and as I laughed at her so must I laugh at myself.”

And he did.

Often, in later years, he would tell people how that girl had “made” him. “I hunted her up afterward, gave her money and sent her to her ‘mother old and gray.’ A week or so later, she was back on Broadway. In a burst of confidence she told me her mother had eloped with the iceman, ‘who was no gentleman and did not know how to treat a lady’—meaning herself—so she came back where she was appreciated.”

X

You can distinguish the Hartsell home on Riverside Drive without any trouble; there is a lawn and a garden—both unique in a location where land is sold by the ounce—and the house itself is like a Florentine villa. Inside it is a treasure house of paintings, bronzes and old china. Each room is faithful to some particular period except one where Hartsell dictates or pounds the typewriter. On its walls are framed playbills of the sixty-two musical shows he has written, and some few “dodgers” or “heralds”—little square pieces of pasteboard used for ashcan, battue and débris advertising, and one or two “eight-sheets,” lithograph parodies of the face of Carlotta Alleyne, “musical comedy’s favorite star,” or, as booking managers describe her, “the sure-fire box-office attraction.”

Perhaps it was neither chivalrous nor womanly for Lottie Allen to have told Tommy Hartsell that it was she who had plotted to make him successful, and that he owed everything to her: first, for teaching him to find himself; second, for

directing the managers' minds toward the same search. He had asked her, in a tired way, why.

"Because I love you, Tommy," she said simply. "I wanted you to succeed because I knew I was going to succeed myself, and I didn't want you to be known simply as the husband of a famous actress."

"The husband!" he had ejaculated, petrified.

"You know you like me as well as you like anybody," she returned. "And you've got to marry some time. And since I've done everything for you—"

She had begun to cry softly.

"Oh, don't do that," said Hartsell irritably.

"Now you're successful, you'll never know whether other girls are after you to help them on in the business, or because you've got money now and can give them things; while I—you know I love you. And—what do you want in a woman that I haven't got? Everybody says I'm pretty, and I've made a hit, and I'll learn whatever you want me to, and be a good 'pal' and—"

"I give in," said Hartsell, laughing. "I guess you're a pretty good bet, Lottie. Come here, poor little thing, and nestle under the wing."

He raised his arm so she could put her head under it.

"Well," he had said in a gentle raillery, looking down at the pretty, tearful face—"well, poor little thing, did it want her Tommy as much as all that?"

She had responded with a satisfied sound, which, if she were not so feminine and attractive, we would call a little grunt, and he kissed her; whereupon she made believe to purr like a pleased kitten.

As for Linthicum—Charles Lester Linthicum, the amateur Bohemian—you may read how he tragically discovered her love for another man; how he pleaded that he would "make her care for him in spite of all"; how a well-groomed, manly

man very much like his "clean-cut, strong and silent" heroes, was reduced to a pitiful, sobbing and—worst of all—disheveled and womanly bundle of nerves; while the "Vampire" sat by, cold and unmoved, even a little bored, and, while patting her hair preparatory to going out as soon as she was rid of him, actually hummed a little tune (from "The Parisians")—you may read, we repeat, all of these things in "The Vampire Woman," conceded by all the shop- and school-girls, young ladies of the "uptown (meaning Harlem and the Bronx) younger set" and real *débutantes* ("downtown" if we *must* say it) to be his ablest and most thrilling novel, and which has been handed by many a mother to her son that he may see how heartless, soulless and utterly worthless the stage makes a woman.

Yet to Hartsell, this same soul-eating, blood-sucking vampire was but a "poor little thing which is to come and nestle under the wing," a sort of "well done, thou good and faithful mental inferior, but otherwise more or less attractive young person." It is simply the difference between the dramatic viewpoint and the human one.

II. THE PURPLE PHANTASM

OBSERVE the beehive—a moth lies dead at its entrance; observe its splendid, gorgeous wings. Yet far from welcoming a beautiful playfellow, the guardians of the gate have straightway stung her to death. Observe that bees are wise, and know that lovely things, like ballet dancers with iridescent skirts, may have within them that uncleanly spawn that rots out in an hour the lifework of the swarm.

Observe, also, that man is not so wise. Like the bees, he has gates to guard, outposts of the spirit; and if these are left unguarded in the pursuit of wealth or fame, that purple-winged phantasm, *Passion*, flies through the warderless gate and, in a single moment, a life of palace-building is undone. . . .

I

OBSERVE the cases of the boy with pretty eyelashes—of Potter Playfair—Rose Rhett—Guy Bassity, to each of whom, at the brink of success, passion came; and so absorbed had they been in building palaces, they had no time to consider these might be destroyed.

First of all let us consider Rose Rhett; in our Broadway solar system she is the moon round which those satellites, the pretty-eyelashed boy, Playfair, and Bassity—wane or wax.

She was not always of Broadway—she had to come there by wire-concurrent orbits. A rowdy open-air honkatonk—drunken men throwing dimes and quarters—waiters slipping to her surreptitiously brass checks representing half the price

of drinks purchased in her honor—these constituted her first theatrical experience.

More and more the younger generation becomes cognizant that riches and honor are not necessarily allied. Rose Rhett's father had thought so; thus at fifty, after thirty-five years' service in certain mills, discharged for incompetency, he had only a small paid-up insurance policy for income. So Rose must quit her training for that Mecca of all poor, clever girls—a school teacher's place—and work in mills, too. But new ideas were abroad: the newspapers and magazines were pointing out that great fortunes were often less the result of great brains than of mean ones. Socialists shrieked on street corners, giving detailed histories of great financial highwaymen: in these idealistic frenzies overlooking selfishness, the root of most human endeavors: so, instead of their citations teaching men to band together and be brothers as the Socialists imagined they would, they but uncovered for them a new fact—that honesty was seldom the best policy—if one would be a favorite of the Golden Gods.

Thus Rose Rhett read in her favorite Sunday journals the history of a little dancer who drew two Presidents' salaries for having loved a king; she read of a French *demi-mondaine* who asserted that one President's salary was only sufficient to dress one really smart woman for one year—and many similar statements and stories, granted more space than the greatest scientific discovery—far more admiration being given these light ladies and their famous friends, men who seemed to spend their lives hanging jewels on fair necks; and thus reading, Rose, lying late in her slum bedroom on Sundays, began to regard her hardworking father and mother as mentally deficient for dedicating their pretty daughter to a life of toil.

Each week she would wait eagerly for Sunday's latest stories of fortune's newest favorites, their jewelry, Pome-

ranian dogs, "bijou houses," sartorial eccentricities, theatrical triumphs; and reading, waited her chance; until one Monday morning she answered a published call for "young ladies to sing and dance."

They were required, it proved, for the summer season at Eureka Park. They must be on duty daily for "vaudeville," two until twelve, and, while singing and dancing, must strive to catch the eyes of as many drink-purchasers as possible—for there was no admission fee—and when invited must order no less than twenty-five cents' worth of drink: to encourage which they received on each half the purchase price—the drinks they were commanded to order being water colored with green to pass for *crème de menthe*, and all profit.

No respectable girl could consider the job; as a number of girls told the plain-spoken cigar-chewing owner before departing in dudgeon.

"Don't want 'um respectable," he growled. "But," said Rose, nerving herself, "that's *all*, isn't it?" He surveyed her in approval. "*That's* the talk! Sure, it's all, s'far's *I'm* concerned. There you sit under ten dollars' worth of electricity an hour—as safe as if God had you in His pocket. But no screaming or fighting jest becuz of an arm around you or a pinch on the cheek. Gi 'em some run for their money—so long as they sit and spend; and a smart, pretty girl like you kin tuck away a half-century every pay night when you cash in your checks. I pays fifteen bucks wages, alone."

Rose had realized, with a sudden inspiration, her superiority to those girls who had insisted on "respectability." Let them run back to their five-dollar-a-week jobs and maybe marry some "hick" making ten or twelve, and sweat and stew in tenements with their dirty brats. The time had passed when "poor but honest," "poor but respectable," had any magic power to move her. They taught ignorant people to be those things, priests and parsons and school-teachers did,

and then were glad to be invited to dinner with rich people who hadn't been anything of the kind. . . .

Men—that was a woman's job. This Eureka Park affair would be only a stepping stone: she would learn how to face an audience, save some money for good clothes, then betake herself elsewhere. It was better to go to school outside and burst upon Broadway competent, fascinating.

It required just such a strong stimulant to go through what followed. Her first appearance—how weakly she had sung, and how much off key! But someone had shouted at her, encouragingly, that it was "all right, kid"; and his admiring eyes reminded her she was pretty and young and well-shaped, and that her low-cut short-skirted pink dress and her pink silk stockings concealed none of these charms. . . . How hard it had been afterward to thread the long aisles of tables and chairs with those stupid oxen leering at her ankles! But she had set her teeth, and soon the shame was swallowed up by triumph of easy victory. Even on her first day, she surpassed all Eureka Park records. "Half a century?" With her wages, she was never to pocket less than sixty or seventy; and she received an offer from every visiting manager of burlesque shows—whose custom it is to make the rounds of these summer park "honkatonks" in hopes of discovering comedians and comely choristers. If they imagined, however, that their shining social superiority and influential powers commanded Rose's admiration, they soon met disconcerting rebuffs.

"I get enough of *that out there*," she panted one night, as she dealt one of these gentlemen a staggering reward for an attempt at familiarity. "I hate men—the whole lot of you!" Indeed, her duties in front, once learned, were accomplished mechanically. She knew the sort of smile, the tone of voice, the veiled half-promise, to set her men a-tingle, causing them to buy drink after drink, crudely imagining her

melting under alcoholic influence—drinks Rose learned how to spill dexterously, unnoticed. And she knew how to pick her men. Gay young ribbon clerks and such never became insolvent by spending their Saturday-night dollars on her. Fascinating young gentlemen ogled her in vain. She picked the sturdy mechanics and small storekeepers, the dullards and the middle-aged. . . . As her envious companions said, she seemed to smell money.” As a matter of fact the signs were obvious after a little study to anyone with brains; or, at any rate, the signs of those who had none, or who did not mean to spend it; at least among the simple types that frequented Eureka Park. She soon yearned for subtler game.

But she was to find one cannot be game at all and be subtle: the wise and fools are curiously alike in the pursuit of the purple phantasm. . . .

A burlesque show carried her to Broadway. Six months later Potter Playfair told her he was a caveman.

II

“A CAVEMAN,” Mr. Playfair repeated, adding a sort of low growl through the teeth that firmly clenched the cigar. “I go in for elemental things; my plays have *guts*—GUTS,” he added in Roman letters. “I look for motives—raw and bleeding—and I write plays around them. Big red-blooded plays—primitive—primordial.” (He had recently acquired the latter word from the works of the California Kipling.) “Yes, my girl, *primordial*. To hell with conventions!” He smashed them all with a wave of his hand. “To hell with religion, education, colleges—all the things that make mollicoddles. Give me man in the rough. . . . That’s the man’s way—Playfair’s way.”

You are to imagine all this out of the same corner of the

mouth that held the cigar, the eye above it almost permanently closed, the mouth twisted downward, flattening out the jowls into a heavy chin. You are to imagine clothes of loose, heavy cloth that gave their wearer an appearance of bulk; and, in the street, a sombrero further obscuring that luckless left eye. Rose Rhett seemed to imagine and to admire. Her hands were clasped; her eyes held artless admiration.

"I never met a man like you," she said dreamily.

"And yet—*they* don't understand me," growled Mr. Playfair in a dissatisfied voice. He told her he was then engaged in staging at his own expense a play on which no manager would risk money. "A play about a man like me—a real man. He comes to this effete East" (Mr. Playfair had been born in Troy) "and he makes these mollycoddles jump through hoops. But they don't appreciate it, these managers—they're mollycoddles themselves. . . . I don't know why I'm telling you all this—"

"Isn't there such a thing as people just fitting in?" she asked. "Understanding—well, just naturally—if you know what I mean—"

He regarded her with gloomy preoccupation. "How I need somebody who understands!" he said. "Not vampires—the women who never can understand.' . . ."

"I know," said Rose softly. "How glad it makes me feel I've met a man who understands women! It's so easy for women to deceive most men. But a man like you—a big man—sees through our petty, shallow little brains. . . ." She was quoting liberally from a novel she had read recently.

"Some are not petty. Some—" But the great thought could not find ready words. "Some understand," he compromised vaguely.

"*Some*," was her wistful response, "yes, but, oh, how few! And when men meet *them*, they're so soured by the others they don't trust them, don't give them their due. Not that I

am complaining. It isn't the men's fault." . . . And feeling she had gone far enough for the moment, she asked him quickly about rehearsals.

"I'm going to let her understudy the lead," he told his stage-director when that worthy opened reproachful eyes at this superfluous expense. "She's got *brains*—we need somebody in the company with brains."

Really, he was just as easily handled as the others, this first famous man of her acquaintance. Famous? "Lucky" was a better word. What had Mr. Playfair that any average man had not?

III

HER question was well put. It was the trade, not the man. Others had seen fit to study the mechanics of steam engineering, gas fitting, plumbing. Mr. Playfair had learned instead the mechanics of the stage, and successful plays are more apt to be a question of mechanics than of genius: jobs better suited to commonplace men than extraordinary ones who have ideas that play sad havoc with the self-satisfaction of the *bourgeoisie*.

One of Mr. Playfair's early sorrows had been that he was conventional of conduct and appearance—that he liked the things everybody liked. But the growth of his literary ambitions changed all this. It was then that Mrs. Playfair, a quiet little woman with a habit of babies, had developed vampirian instincts—failing to conceal from him a deadly sense of humor, urging that a large sombrero was funny upon a short man with fat legs: begging him to have a care how he scowled and spoke harshly to car-conductors, who, not knowing their new importance, carried them past their block; or to restless but heavily built men who jostled

them in crowds—other malefactors; pointing out in a most disparaging tone that his hands were too soft to give a good account of themselves at fisticuffs.

At which he would frown heavily upon her, and flattening his jowls upon his collar to thicken his naturally thin voice, would speak malevolently, cruelly, of the surgical operation he would perform upon them. And, next time, his voice would be fiercer in its scorn of the offender. Soon he came to dislike nothing so much as her quiet smile; with his first royalties, removing himself from his bookkeeper's high stool, his native town, her and his four children—who knew him afterward only as a holiday visitor and a writer of inadequate cheques.

In New York, he had no wife to give him uneasiness as to the possible puerility of his personal prowess, to check a flow of romantic imagination in attire and accounts of adventure; nor had anyone there been a schoolmate and licked him for tattling to teacher or correcting the vagaries of luck at marbles. He was able to work unhindered at the greatest character in his gallery of creations—Potter Playfair, the Caveman.

IV

ROSE, meanwhile, had been getting ready for him. Her intimate experience with men had begun early after her Broadway arrival. She had struck town at an ill moment for engagements—just after the last wave of autumn productions had washed to the feet of the Christmas trees and before those of the early spring were about to go into rehearsal. Only a few musical pieces were getting ready, and these could choose from the survivors of all the season's shipwrecks; what chance for a girl with no Broadway acquaintance and

without a good singing voice? But before her small savings left from the purchase of striking-looking millinery had vanished, she had learned of the Actors' Club on a street in the forties, and had removed her belongings to a hotel opposite; in a lobby window of which, on the day of her hegira, we see her—a cat at a mouse-hole; and, whenever there passed from the club entrance opposite a player whom she recognized from published photographs as well as known in musical comedy, she might be observed to hasten forth and pass that player; after which she betrays no haste at all. The first actor looks curious, half starts toward her at her shop window; perhaps the fact that the window contains jewelry causes reconsideration. The second, though she does not frown at his steady stare—is it that he remembers that speech, without the acquaintance of the lady spoken to, is considered a heinous crime by police judges? . . . And, for this reason or another, all the others failed to figure as Lotharios, and, late in the afternoon, as she returned for the eighth time to her crow's nest, she was reduced to bowing boldly to a boy with long eyelashes but unknown to her by photographic fame, who had only the doubtful prestige of being seen quitting the club.

"How do you do, Mr. Cassel?"—the address and the bow of one slightly acquainted. She was too pretty to have such a misconception of his identity, so he hastened to explain and to "hope that is no handicap." But, no—she couldn't think of it . . . she could sink right through the ground for her stupid blunder . . . if he was a gentleman he would immediately leave her. . . .

They dined together daily after that; but she knew there was another woman from the fact that the boy always chose out-of-the-way restaurants; because when she had suggested he use his influence to place her in the piece in which he would soon begin rehearsals, he had quickly hastened to assure

her the piece was impossible—he wouldn't have her waste her time—it was a certain sour one—would set critical teeth on edge.

In nowise deceived, she soon forced him to confess that the female to be starred liked his long eyelashes. So there was nothing to do but, on the night of this revelation, to give herself quite deliberately, and without the slightest passion; but crying aloud in a choking voice that he must not persuade her . . . that it was unfair to take advantage because he knew of her love for him . . . she had not thought he was that sort of a man.

The next day, the boy threw to the winds the "sure-fire" part that would have won him golden opinions from the majority of those critical gentlemen who think actors write their own parts. After a scene as dramatic as in any play—an actor and an actress let loose on an "I love another" scene, he rang down the curtain on a no longer youthful favorite of the public prostrate on a sofa, hieing him from thence to agencies, where, having some little reputation, he was engaged for a commonplace juvenile in a Viennese operetta, in which, as Rose had intimated, they could be together—"dearest." Before signing his contract, he made "dearest" a proviso.

Through him, Rose met the actors and managers of his acquaintance: no more out-of-the-way places now, but Curate's and Sydenham's, where she could learn to know celebrities by their nicknames. But, it appeared, luck had deserted the pretty boy, who laid it, superstitiously, at the door of his ingratitude to the lady who had given him his chance when an amateur, his first chance: had advanced him by rapid stages, and . . .

"Why don't you go back to your old lady then?" Rose would ask scornfully; and in wild despair—for his innamorata's love grew cold as his ill-luck increased—he would poetize wildly

and dramatically: the world well lost with her in his arms . . . such things must atone for the utter failure of the operetta after eight weeks' rehearsals and nineteen consecutive performances; atone for his failure to obtain other paying work, for the abnormal hit his successor had achieved with the discarded part, and the rumor that he would soon be co-starred with the discarded lady.

Rose was glad when the exigencies of the privy purse took him to the only opening—a stock “lead” in Louisville. No, she would not go with him “and be a burden”; she must find a position for herself and he must “save”; and they would be reunited and solvent in the autumn. He wrote her a hundred despairing folios; and, until she met Playfair and because the room rent must be paid, she answered daily.

The pretty boy never got back to Broadway: his actorial pride prevented taking on unimportant juveniles again, he who had been the object of the Louisville matinée girls' admiration. The purple phantasm had met him in mid-ocean:—he must thereafter be a Flying Dutchman who could never make the right shore.

V

CORRESPONDINGLY, it was so with Potter Playfair. Given another year unimpeded by personal distractions, he would have been wealthy. The tide of just his kind of middle-class melodrama was high, and he rode on the early wavelets. The failure of his “social drama”—the invasion of Fifth Avenue by the hairy man—would have taught him not to produce plays deemed impossible by all managers; those gentlemen being fair judges of the sort of mediocrity that will make much money. Chastened, he would have returned to his melodrama and to other men's ideas; but, as it was, he had

a further handicap: an unknown girl upon whom he insisted as the leading lady; and when the new piece was given a provincial try-out with her, and she demonstrated she needed years of experience, the man behind the bank-roll gave as ultimatum another leading lady or no New York première—driving Playfair into his celebrated caveman portrayal and an offer to buy back the production rights, thus becoming his own producer again.

Rose had realized the justice of the manager's contention: realized the play was as saffron as any of the Fourteenth Street tribe; realized that there had been only a temporary revival of interest in such pieces, the public having sickened of "problems" and imitations of Oscar Wilde; realized, because she read the leading periodicals for "culture," that a nugget of cheap sensation could be so polished with realistic acting, gorgeous scenery and lights that it would seem virgin gold. It was to ride in the wake of the original discoverer of this fact that a manager had accepted Playfair's first play, put an expert craftsman to work teaching the author to give rubber-stamp villains and heroes natural dialogue, and had engaged an all-star cast. So with the other Playfair successes.

Rose knew this new one was utterly impossible with an amateur leading lady and other actors such as Playfair would engage: he saw no necessity for expensive protagonists—"the village choir can give 'Down on the Suwanee River,'" was his favorite contention. So it was with utter selfishness that she encouraged his insurgency. She knew the average newspaper critic would blame the play; not a pretty girl; meanwhile her pictures as leading lady would adorn theater and hotel lobbies and magazine covers, would be reproduced in every illustrated periodical in the country. Fame! Worth dollars, too. Let the play fail—which it accordingly did.

But for a few weeks on the strength of his former hits it drew small audiences, and Playfair kept paying losses and

advertising it widely as the "season's first success"—"with Rose Rhett in her great impersonation of Selina Sue"—this latter at her insistent demands: any demand of hers was law to the caveman.

He was no longer, however, the caveman with her. Once he had welcomed the purple phantasm, she had ceased to be the woman who "understood." True, she still salved his pride by pretending to believe in his greatness and in his primitiveness—that cost nothing, and she knew hurt vanity was a terrible enemy to usurping phantasms. But she allowed him no assurance of a lifelong love, showing decided interest in the leading man of the company, answering vivaciously letters from a more noted brother author, encouraging a reporter who came to interview her. Also she smiled when well-known citizens occupied boxes—and often they sent her flowers and candy, which Playfair would pitch into the stage-door alley, grinding his teeth and tearing at his scanty hair. He even went so far as to discharge the leading man and threaten the reporter.

All of which made it easy for Rose to feather her nest. She impressed on him that much jewelry could hang about her neck if she listened to the importunities of admiring box-occupants. She called his attention to the motor cars of other girls: how cheerfully would a certain manufacturer bestow one on her were she his instead of Playfair's. She told of an utterly fictitious offer of a large salary from a Chicago manager—this, she encouraged Playfair to think, a preparatory step to more personal offers. Thus, in addition to the expense money for their joint apartment, her modiste's, milliner's and other bills, Rose soon had many huge solitaires, always convertible into cash, her car, and savings accounts in several banks. And Playfair strained personal credit to the breaking point.

Worst of all—for this held no return for expenditure—

his wife had sued him at the height of his earning capacity, naming Rose as co-respondent, and had been adjudged alimony founded on the income of those years when he had successful plays running. Whereas, now, he had none. All in all, he knew he would be a bankrupt unless some desperate *coup* were made. Yet he had neither the inspiration, the confidence nor the time to write another play. And he could write only plays. Hearing him, night after night, groaning by her side, watching him in the early morning hours sit by the open window, head between his palms, Rose saw she was killing the golden-egg layer; and, while his sufferings moved her not in the least, this goose was valuable and must live. Giving the matter urgent thought, she suggested vaudeville: Miss Rose Rhett, late star of "The Heart of the Wolf," in "So-and-So-So-and-So," the first contribution to vaudeville of the famous playwright, Potter Playfair, author of those successes of the century, "Mated with an Eagle," "Iron Hands," "Red Blood and Blue," etc., etc. The luster of his name was not yet dimmed with vaudeville audiences; the act would command a high price; she would be able to impress them with her own fame through the mere juxtaposition of Playfair's name and hers. A success—and she knew her lack of art would be no handicap here—she had only to be careful to select conventional heroics or coarse comedy construction by vaudeville "sure-fire" authors; and she could continue at a high salary, without any further assistance.

VI

VAUDEVILLE audiences had just progressed to the point of appreciating the discarded fashions of the legitimate stage, when misfortune turned to other business and let Playfair alone for a while. The playlet that would have been laughed

off by Playfair's former audiences created a sensation with his new one; but Rose was considered more responsible than he, and was approached by many booking agents with flattering offers. So at last she had accomplished her purpose: she was no longer dependent upon anyone's favor; she could sign to-morrow contracts for two years' continuous booking. In vaudeville it is names that count; material is easily obtained from any number of words-and-music mongers who can write sure-fire stuff for their unintelligent audiences in a purely perfunctory manner; the difficulty is to do the accidental thing that will make the hit and command the salary. . . . She no longer needed Playfair nor anyone.

And, for the first time since that Monday morning when she went to Eureka Park instead of to the mills, she relaxed. She was tired of posing, tired of being a lady, weary of pretending affection every time she wanted a new hat, fed up with listening sympathetically to ambitions and affectations in order to negotiate an extra amount of spending money; had had enough of calculating the effect of every word, gesture, action, . . . everything, as a matter of business. Now that she had achieved her ambition, she wanted pleasure. Before, she could do nothing that would offend the ethics of men. Now that she had no need to transmute their admiration into bank accounts, they could think what they liked; and she plunged into pleasure as boldly as she had into business, overlooking no possibilities, playing now for the attention of the sort of males whom, hitherto, she had avoided—those attractive to the women of Advertisement Alley because of notorious reputations, handsome faces, evil minds. Eluding Playfair on all possible occasions, she accompanied them to the town's hidden dissipations—the rathskellers where are forbidden dances and songs, where people speak openly, even proudly, of forbidding vices: back rooms where cocain and

heroin circulate as freely as beer: all this she found novel and amusing. She—in a phrase—yearned for thrills.

Poor Playfair realized none of this iniquity—only knew that her usual hour for returning home was approximating daybreak. Then one morning she was absent from breakfast, and he did not see her until she reported at the matinée; when, in desperation and dismay, he relapsed into a frayed caveman portrayal; which was greeted with mirth long concealed. A painful scene ensued, in which she saw a naked soul—and what a poor pitiful thing it was; so poor and pitiful that she forgave him his bad man's sombrero, the cigar between clenched teeth, the flattening of jowls, heavy chin and voice. The poor fellow had done all these things for fear someone would discover he had a woman's soul.

But now that he was to lose her, all the barriers went down; and she saw the boy who had run to mother, who had taken vengeance for the insults and rough treatment of other boys by writing tales of knightly prowess and bloody adventure, in all of which he, the hero, made short work of his cowardly enemies: saw the little man who had continued those dreams on a bookkeeper's stool and at night had lived them and put them into plays; who had at length timidly ventured to create out of his own poor clay one of the characters he had ever longed to be.

In his boyhood, when he had come wildly weeping to his mother's knee, she had wiped away the tears and taken him into her arms. But there was no one now, and: "Oh, God!" he sobbed. "Oh, God! Oh, God!"

And then: "I'll do anything . . . only tell me . . . anything. I'll work twice as hard—I'll give you everything. Only, don't leave me—oh, for God's sake don't—don't, don't leave me! Rose, my Rose, mine, you can't be so cruel when I love you so . . ."

And, in the end, "Oh, God!" he shrieked, throwing him-

self down full length before her. "Oh, God! . . . Oh, God!! Oh, God!!!"

It was eight months later that she, face downward on a bed in a London hotel, her rifled jewel box and ravished purse nearby, shrieked out just these same words.

VII

GUY BASSITY, the rifler and ravisher, had made a business of women just as she had of men; and, searching for someone who would lead her into that wonderland of the senses of which she had seen so much written, heard so much talk—Rose had been attracted to him by the stories of his fascination: how a famous prima donna had succumbed at a single meeting, how some young heiress had to be sent away to keep Mr. Bassity out of the family—while for ordinary conquests, there were a dozen women of Rose's acquaintance who telephoned in vain. She had been intensely proud that she had been seen with him three nights running. Then she became one of the brigade of reproachful telephoners. Ever and again he would relent and come to a special dinner at her apartment; but finally he told her frankly he could not afford theaters and restaurants. As she made no comment on this, he came no more to dinner; until she bethought herself in desperation to explain that she had engaged theater seats. Finding this effectual, she loaned him her purse and suggested supper afterward. Whereupon, he became immediately gay, convulsed her with cynical stories and impressed upon her his weariness of women.

Perhaps the purple phantasm, lurking at the guarded gate, got its first chance to wedge in its way when Rose determined she would show Sir Egotist that here was one with whom he would not get the chance to grow weary. Then tears of

humiliation when he bade her good-night at the downstairs door resolved her to make him love her desperately, then to discard him as coolly as she had Playfair. How she would laugh then at this self-proclaimed conquerer of women!

And, as a result, she now lay weeping in that London hotel. What easy game she had been for him; what insults she had endured, what blows; with every one loving him more fiercely, willing to accede to anything sooner than that the other eagerly waiting women—of whom he never forbore telling her—should snatch him away. For Bassity—although he bore no resemblance to a caveman, being instead rather foppish in appearance—knew how to arouse in women the same terror that the character Playfair portrayed so badly aroused in his mate. Nothing was too evil if it proved him their master: no speech was too harsh, no oath too vile, no blow too hard, to teach them not to contest him in either word or deed. He beat down the bulwarks of their self-esteem and made them think themselves even less important than they were: while correspondingly increasing their belief in his superiority; moreover, he knew instinctively that a woman feels some of the passionate pain of childbirth in the blows of her beloved. He knew all these things, not that he was by nature masterful, but because he had enough of the feminine in his own nature to know unerringly what they thought and why they thought it: paying small attention to anything said or done, as indexes of character.

So, when he struck Rose the first time and she had screamed out her hatred and bade him never to speak to her again, he had smiled and gone his way; and in a few hours she was telephoning, to find he was not at his rooms. The picture of him in another woman's arms had arisen to her tortured brain: had stood between her and sleep. To banish it, she took the one chance of disapproval: telephoned every restaurant, café, rathskeller and "joint" he frequented; and,

finally locating him, wept tears of thankfulness. So he returned to her, knowing he was master at last. . . . Strange that Rose did not see he was pursuing almost precisely the same policy as hers with Playfair. But, just as the purple phantasm had banished the playwright's brain then, now it was hers that was banished; passion sees nothing, understands nothing.

Bassity had finally tired of her just as she had of Playfair; but he had been less pitiless: had gone while she was at the theater, leaving gaping purse and empty jewel box to tell their own story—he had advised her not to bank her salary when they came to England, but to keep it in cash until their return to America, saving exchange rates; and he had persuaded her not to take her jewels to the theater—she must remember how dressing-rooms were robbed: all this in anticipation of a “getaway” when the amount of cash should be large enough. And, while she sobbed out her “My God! my God!” Bassity was on the Dover boat, headed for Calais and Paris.

VIII

Most *voyageurs* have a hazy idea that when they have visited Maxim's and the Abbaye, they have exhausted all nocturnal Parisian possibilities. Really, the Abbaye is the thing only directly after the theater, then Fysshers, Maxim's around three, and afterward there are the rowdy ones. Bassity knew this much, and the early morning of the next day—he had left on a *matinée* train—found him in the Royale, chuckling over his new freedom and a plentifully provided future. The scene suited his unruly emotions. He had no longer to play the superior person, to profess a lack of interest in pleasure. Here he could give way to any fancy; he was unknown, surrounded by just the sort of women he liked best,

whom he could have and discard at will, with whom he need play no game. He might drink deeply, too—a sensation he loved; but always he had conquered it when on business bent: a drunken man says endearing things; foolish things; betrays himself; lacks masterfulness.

In New York, when he had wanted so to indulge, he had slipped away to lower resorts than those in the Broadway ken; and, among the women frequenters of such places, was considered a good investment. He knew and rather enjoyed this; pretending to believe in their endearments and in their sad stories; perfectly conscious of their attempts to rob him; checkmating them with glee, even in his drunkenest moments; and, when he bade them good-night, with a drunken laugh sent his love to "Bert" or "Ed." . . .

He had not intended on the night of his arrival to dissipate: it had been too late to hire a safety-deposit box, and he had his treasures upon his person; to hand them over to the safe keeping of a *concièrge*, a hall porter, was too risky for one who had, if anything, too low an estimate of the price a man's honesty could withstand. But, having heard of Apaches, he had secured himself against such by having a policeman pick him a chauffeur guaranteed, one who had stood the test of years on that Capucines corner; and that chauffeur had been told to wait at every place visited: he was waiting outside the Royale now.

Bassity had heard of Apaches, yes, just as other Americans had heard of "gunmen": conceptions at which he had often sneered and at their inspiration, pictures in popular magazines of low lurking fellows, collarless, unshaven. Yet he was willing to believe in the French Apache pictures, in the corduroy-skirted, bandanna-bloused girls, their men with red neckerchiefs and heavily visored caps drawn low. Consequently, it never occurred to him to suspect that the cabaret dancer he

admired, and her poetical-looking admirer, were down on Monsieur the Prefect's list as of that tribe.

She was Spanish—just as the tango dancer at the Café de Paris was South American: he being from Brooklyn, she from Belleville. She was not there to capture men except so far as they might be encouraged to contribute to her plate, to pay for her supper and champagne. Puinpinesse's poetry sought to be like Villon's in all but the "Grosse Margot" period; he was dainty as to what money he took. So although she danced before Bassity's table in hope of more than ordinary contribution, she had had her supper, and she shook her head at the invitation of the second glass he had the waiter fill. Bassity observed then that an exception had been made in favor of the poetical-looking chap—the custom being that wine must be served, a custom complied with at all tables except where stood the poet's absinthe; from which it was easy for one acquainted with the etiquette of fast society to deduce their relationship.

Which made it all the better—to snatch her away and force her to pretend sudden infatuation for a stranger, all the while racked lest "dearest" console himself with arms ever welcoming—Bassity knew all women believe "dearest" is desperately desired by others most fascinating: a delusion "dearest" does his best to promote and preserve.

He had a savage pleasure in the knowledge that the mere sight of his wealth would bring about this triangle, these conflicting emotions. To watch their working-out, all the while pretending stupidly to believe in her: to force her to laughter and dancing and embracing when her heart was heavy; these things were what he would have described as "water on his wheel" . . . and so was ostentatious about calling back the waiter to pay him, displaying a large packet of English banknotes before he drew out a handful of gold.

Had he seen the poet's knee knock against hers at that

moment, Bassity might have reconsidered. He was going on the theory of appearances, which he would never have done in his own country where he knew savage clubbers of citizens at elections, professional thugs in political pay, who often wore eyeglasses and silk shirts; the Playfairs were more apt to look like pirates. But the poet make-up was associated in his mind with peaceable—nay, piffing—instincts. He did not know that in Belleville bars the Villon legend persists: that even the Parisian lower classes have a genuine appreciation of, and pride in, their national literature, and that poetry often inflames them into desperate deeds, even into revolutions.

He had once defined a "sucker" as one who played another man's game. He did not realize he was now doing just that. The purple phantasm had lured him into imagining, for all their different language and customs, he could read nature as readily here as in his own country—a belief responsible for the wealth of "wire-tappers," who would be immediately distrusted by many victims if their profession had really anything to do with tapping wires.

As a result of his carelessly displayed wealth, a conversation ensued between poet and dancer, carried on at first in tones so very low that not even those nearby could hear; but the frown on the poet's face assured Bassity of the correctness of his analysis; and, when their voices rose high enough to be heard, anyone knowing the *argot* would have understood that the poet's frown, now a scowl, was significant of his speech, the dancer's anxious half-smile of pleading, also. Followed a furious quarrel and the poet's departure: then, as the firebrand had foretold, she came to him with a forced smile and put an arm around his neck: her voice declaring adoringly that he was "*très chic*," with many little affectionate slang phrases: "*petit cochon*"—"méchant"—"*petit chameau*" . . . finally yielding to his importunities. But he must wait

until her time was up ; she must dance every quarter-hour until four.

Then, because of her position at the place, her gentle ways, her choice of a poet lover, Bassity, who hated waste, perceived it was useless to pay his cabman to wait any longer, so descended and dismissed him ; and, an hour or so later, descended again, entering a cab that came forward at the sight of the pair.

Once within, Bassity gave himself utterly into the purple phantasm's arms. One who has degraded all the natural instincts into servants of his will must need something evil to rouse him ; and it was the thought that the girl hated him because of the quarrel with her lover, yet must conceal this and do his will, that thrilled him into a savage ecstasy ; and he seized her roughly, hurting her arms with his clutch, shouting at her ugly English words, commanding her in bad French to say she loved him better than the poet, that she hated the poet, that she would do anything her conqueror asked ; and, when she had obeyed, he laughed brutally and shouted in a harsh, cruel voice, pinching her bare arms until she cried out in pain and the driver craned his neck to look in.

He deposited them in a street that coiled up like a great snake at the foot of a great church : a narrow street of many windings, shuttered shop fronts, the entrances of arched courts here and there : a dark, depressing, dank and dirty street ; but Bassity was too full of his evil vision to heed. He followed her into one of the arched entrances, into darkness. . . . The blow that blotted out his senses came upon him while he was chuckling over a new and uglier fancy—a picture never to be painted.

"Sacred mother of a blue camel !" said the poet excitedly, as, after transferring the banknotes and gold to his pockets, the patch of shaded light from his pocket torch revealed the

contents of the chamois bag about Bassity's neck—pure white rays, deep blue and ruby red. . . .

"All single stones, absolutely not to be traced," gasped the cabman; while the dancer shrilled her shock.

The poet buffeted her head against the wall of the archway, calmly, as one who does his duty. Understanding her fault, she wiped away the blood from her mouth, unprotesting. The light disappeared while poet and cabman cogitated. In the darkness, one could hear the girl shiver as though she read their sinister thoughts.

"But this is different, quite," said the poet finally. "To regain such jewels, he will go to his consulate, even to his ambassador—"

"We should have left him to revive," urged the cabman defensively; "as to the money, he could prove nothing. He had too much wine; who knows what he spent? And he slipped down in his drunkenness and she left him. The scandal would cost him more than he has lost. But not more than these jewels. . . . Therefore . . ."

"Don't . . . don't," begged the girl. "Don't Raoul, don't."

"And I will be locked up because I'm your friend, *hein?*" snarled the poet. "Then when they are returned it is New Caledonia. And not returned, it is to drag away months, maybe a year, in the Force or the Madeleine. No!"

"Oh, don't Raoul!" sobbed the girl. He swung at her blindly this time, driving her down to her knees. "A franc—a sou," he demanded, harshly, stretching out his hand to the other man, who felt for him in the darkness, complying. "Choose," said the poet. The cabman called his choice, thickly, and the light flashed on the poet's palm, showing a copper piece, lying face upward. "Your luck," snarled the poet; and the light winked again and showed that he was kneeling near Bassity's upturned face, on which a blue lump was thrusting itself outward, tightening the skin of the forehead. . . .

"Oh, don't, don't, Raoul!" sobbed the kneeling, crouching, girl. But the poet's right hand was busy with the pocket torch, and the other held that with which he did not care to discipline her—not then. As it shot downward, the light went out again.

A little later, a huge, shapeless mass moved through the dark of the Bois: two men carrying from a cab another whose knees dragged the ground and who was flung into a thicket to lie face downward. But he could not cry out to God, nor to any other thing.

Now if human beings were only bees . . .

III. CADGE DIRKSMELTER, DRAMATIC CRITIC

TO the exceptional man there is no more mystery about women than about cabbages. By this (lest we be triumphantly refuted) is not meant the merely successful specialist in money-making, science, statistics, or anything else that has swallowed up all the other brain cells—for Dirksmelter was that; but he whose business and pleasure it is to read in the Book of Life. To such, in return for perfect understanding, women give willingly all they have.

It is not these, who have been treated well by women, but the average man, plain of face and mind—who is responsible for the romantic nonsense about her. Mystery—because she must always conceal from him the truth, lest he weep for his shattered ideals and depart. Modesty—because he likes to believe his ideal has a thousand times more than himself. Higher morality—because she has no use for him except as a provider, hence no passion. The average man is deprived, by sheer respectability, of ever knowing what woman's love means; therefore he talks most about it and invents high-sounding names for his shell to explain the utter worthlessness of kernels.

But the worst are they who write about it, and worst of the worst was Cadge Dirksmelter, now and for some years past "dramatic critic" of the New York "Argus."

I

IF there is one thing more than another that makes wise men laugh, it is those highly moral and instructive articles

signed with the names of well-known actresses. Miss So-and-So, who claims girls can go straight on seven dollars a week because she has done so—the same Miss So-and-So, whose advance agent has instructed half the country's hotel clerks to arrange adjoining rooms for her and her leading man. Miss Never-Mind-Who, who, discussing early chorus days, claims mamma always chaperoned her—"of course": Miss Never-Mind-Who, who in those days had a dim belief "chaperon" was female for "chauffeur." Miss Who-Do-You-Think, who has disguised herself, and, detective-guarded, descended the underworld-ward "local color" gathering for new parts: although such scenes were quite familiar to her when she was an obscure actress. An so forth and so on until an entire Broadway mythology is slowly created.

The other day, a cigar-chewing press representative sank back in his chair, closed his eyes and conjured out of smoke wreaths the methods by which the name of that most recent of stars, Miss Beth Bohun, had attained electric lights—spending, for instance, many years in cloistral study of stage classics: learning French for undeleted Molière, German to be free of unhallowed translations of Schiller, Goethe and Lessing: Spanish for unexpurgated Echegeray. Had he known of a Chinese Shakespeare, no doubt she would have been proficient in Celestial sing-song. Then into stock for five years, refusing numerous Broadway offers solely to play the great Shakespearean and other classical rôles. Then . . .

But what does all this profit us when we know the true story?

Really her career began (although she had never heard of him at the time) with the publication of Dirksmelter's plays; but for which he would have continued a police reporter to his death; unless, at Oslerian incapacity, discharged and given, in pity, a position as night watchman or stage doorkeeper. This same fate, also, had his managing editor *read* the plays

—very bad plays published at his own expense—or rather at the expense of his wife; who, for more than a year, had inked the holes in her shoes, and turned up the collar of her light jacket when in winter time she sallied forth, basket on arm, bargaining with butchers for odds and ends of meat and second-best vegetables. Who, also, revived acquaintance with her former occupation of “vest finishing,” to bring their publication nearer. But she did none of these things for wifely love; but through a laughable ignorance of the theatrical and publishing business; accepting his own belief that the issuance of these plays in book form would speedily put him in a class with one popular dramatist who had received a quarter-million in royalties from a single piece and another who had bought an English castle from the proceeds of a dramatized novel. “Once I manage to get them read . . .” he often hinted darkly. One inferred that *then* there could be no doubt about immediate production and immense success.

Mr. Dirksmelter belonged to that unfortunate class that, having ambition without ability, and being devoid of introspection, a sense of values or a knowledge of standards, imagines the world in league against them. His short stories had been refused by every magazine, known or unknown, most of them even by the editor of his own Sunday Supplement. His plays had been entered in every possible contest wherever English was spoken, and had reposed in the offices of every known manager, of almost every publisher; until, a year before, they had encountered the Badgerton-Beale Company, whose business was not to sell books to the public but to their own authors. To Dirksmelter these gentlemen made a “sporting proposition.” They “had faith in his plays” . . . They would publish and push them until the literary and theatrical worlds were aware of the genius they had been neglecting. But they would not take the customary base advantage of an unknown genius’s usual ignorance of business

to mulct him of the astounding profits that should ensue—let other unprincipled (and better known) publishers do *that*! These had the interest of unknown genius at heart: their lifework was to see unknown genius got what it deserved!—therefore, would be its partners in publishing its work, of the cost of which (five hundred dollars) they would furnish half, plus heavy expenses of advertising . . .

Their actual method was, of course, to print a few hundred galley proofs, cut them into 12mo length and bind them along with cheap pirate reprints; pocketing more than one-third of the two hundred and fifty Dirksmelter furnished, after a year and a half of savage saving. To which was soon added an extra fifty from author's purchases—of many volumes in addition to that half a dozen furnished "free." So copies of the great work came into the possession of all prominent managers; and Dirksmelter, relaxing with happy sighs, awaited a deluge of fame and fortune.

Fortunately he also bethought himself to present one, in person, to his managing editor; that this idiotic autocrat might observe what manner of genius was wasting itself upon police reporting. And thus came his reward; for the few literary critics to whom the publishers sent the book, familiar with the shady methods of its publication, refused to recognize it save in a chronicle of "Books Received," and managers' readers, remembering the plays from manuscript, tossed the volume aside angrily. But when the managing editor turned its pages idly it was without knowledge of publishers or plays, only with the remembrance of a dramatic reviewer's post to fill, the current incumbent having resigned to alliterate in the interests of a "big show." So the city editor was sent for.

"How's this man Dirksmelter?" he was asked. Having replied non-enthusiastically, he was tossed the volume of plays, his superior adding: "You know what the Big Fellow always used to say: 'No good for anything else? Make him

dramatic editor!' . . . Read the book? . . . Neither did I. But all the highbrows publish their plays nowadays; and the magazines are going in for highbrow criticism. Maybe, for a change that might be better than the funny-dog stuff Kauffman did—hey?"

"I'd be just as glad to have a different district man," returned the city editor, a specialist in first principles. "Lots of times we'd 'a' been beat in his without the 'flimsies.' . . . And, far as dramatic criticism goes, don't seem to make much difference who writes 'em—nobody reads 'em 'cept theatrical people, that is, and would-be's. Public goes to see the show that advertises most. . . . And—anyhow—you couldn't get a *good* reporter to *take* the job. Septimus Drake's criticisms 're syndicated, and he only gets *seventy-five*; and the best known in the States—while any good reporter makes a hundred any good week. But Dirksmelter never got over his thirty-five guarantee 'cept when some cyclone broke; so I s'pose he'll be glad enough to take your forty regular."

II

So Dirksmelter was apprised of his appointment and had hard work to keep from turning somersaults. Had the wages been less, he would have accepted and put his family on short rations. A chance to show up these ignorant managers! . . . to make them pay for their slighting of his work!! Actors, too, star actors who had returned his scripts!!! Playwrights who had written him discouraging letters!!!! He went to his first opening night as a Corsican to his first *vendetta*. The next morning, the world would know what sort of a fellow was he whose light they had been smothering. . . . But it did not prove the triumph he had expected. He was ashamed to be seated so far down front, he in his shabby, dusty clothes,

surrounded by men and women in evening dress—even his fellow “critics,” whom he recognized from their published photographs, were so attired—and the play was one by a leading British dramatist of the new school, whose life had been one long fight against the very dramatic conventions that Dirksmelter had come to deride; although he did not know precisely what they were.

So he was sadly ill at ease until his attention was attracted to the majority of the “critics” stalking out in the middle of the third act; and then he saw his chance. He would begin his private war with those same critics: would begin his maiden notice with the unfairness of reviews based on the lesser nine-tenths of the play; and upon this excellent point he would harp in future, convincing the stray reader it was his duty to read the one who was not like other critics.

At the same battered desk that had served him as a reporter, he wrote, with all the glow of one who feels he is attracting attention to himself, and purely by accident, the only sane “criticism” accorded the new production; for, having begun with his tirade against his dull brothers, and while sitting palm in hand thinking of equally unpleasant things to say about dull theatrical managers, he was attracted by some information yielded by the program at which he had been steadily staring. It bore the name not of a well-known producer but of one of many of the new societies for stage uplift. Another idea seized him. It was the custom of the critics of the Manhattan dailies to deride drama societies, to call their productions “not plays, mere conversations.” With regard to the present play he had meant to do the same: the British insurgent had discarded all the time-worn devices Dirksmelter had been taught to recognize as drama. But the name of the Uplift League changed that. It was against the managers, too. He would use it as a bludgeon with which to swing on managerial conks, yet hide his personal malice

under the guise of drama-developing. But, having no exact idea of what the play meant, he ascended some dark and dirty steps and dived into filedom, discovering the insurgent's aims and ambitions, reasons (apart from purely commercial ones) for writing plays and many reviews of this one from the more enlightened London prints. Of all this he wrote a careful paraphrase intended to prove that he was quite as enlightened as the insurgent himself: a brother-in-arms; hinting broadly that he, alone of all New York reviewers, was capable of appreciating such greatness . . .

Now it has been often proved that entire ignorance is better than a little knowledge. Out of Monte Carlo come frequent tales of the greenhorn gambler who by taking foolish risks closes a table for the day. Out of Indiana come country schoolmasters with best-selling romances worse written, more ridiculously conceived than the worst hack writer would dare. Out of the Bowery come songs that sweep the country, containing near-rhymes that offend even the unrhythmical ears of Tin Pan Alley *jongleurs*. . . . And the discoverer of America was seeking Cathay!

So in his ignorance Dirksmelter dared to do an unprofessional thing: dared risk the ridicule of a united brotherhood. For his complete ignorance of the play's purpose might have been revealed in any line of his paraphrase and would have left him at the mercy of the many he had exoriated: who would, vengefully, have made him so ridiculous that his resignation would have been requested. But Luck had looked over his shoulder and guided his pencil; and, within the next few days, he had won notoriety that, in his greediest dreams, he had not the imagination to conceive; his only rivals in a sea of advertising the queens of vaudeville and the fairies of soap. Small was the fame of best-selling novelists and popular playwrights beside that which looked up at him from every third ashcan and every sixth billboard. His

name thereon was in larger letters than the plays, while those of the author's were no larger than the least of his lightest words. The fact that Cadge Dirksmelter (N. Y. *Argus*) had approved of the Insurgent, and of the Uplift League, seemed to be of more importance for the public to know than the fact that women should wear only certain corsets or that men should drink only certain ryes.

"You see," he pointed out to his wife, when she had urged some ridiculous reason for replenishing her ancient wardrobe. He had taken her for a walk—after dark, of course, so that the well-known critic might not be observed openly to associate with so shabby a female—and was discovering his name in the most remote and inaccessible places, often in letters a foot high. "Suppose you were a stranger to me," he went on, "and you saw all that advertising and then saw such a well-known man in old wornout clothes when everybody else had on dress suits—dress suits," he added, proudly and with the air of possession; for did there not repose at home such a suit? Later, attired in it, with trousers and coat lapels in knifelike creases, a ready-made bowtie fastened with elastic around a choker collar, and a square-cut white waistcoat that looked like a stage parlor maid's apron; yes, even with black bone buttons for studs, his egotism failed to appreciate any marked difference between what looked back from the mirror and what the artist for the ready-made clothes company had drawn, with a young Apollo in one of a Fifth Avenue tailor's masterpieces for model.

And yet, far from being satisfied, that exasperating woman of his had again whined. It was a whine she was to repeat for many months to come; especially when she came to imagine that, if new apparel was also hers, she might occupy that other orchestra chair beside her husband—for all reviewers receive a pair of seats—that, nightly, was unoccupied. But she never did; which was unlucky for Dirksmelter in

two ways, for it not only gave the manager of the Hyperian Theater an excuse to seat Bessie Boone alongside the "critic" one night, but also gave Bessie her excuse to be merciless later on, when she heard of this monumental selfishness.

III

BUT we must be content with the ill-luck of the moment. Dirksmelter did not recognize it for what it was; seeing only the pretty girl for whom the theater manager, leaning over his chair, besought his gentle mercies: "the house sold out . . . an old friend."

Dirksmelter thought her a divine innocent, as she sat beside him prattling artlessly of the play and its people, some acquaintances. Yes, she was on the stage; although it was no place for a girl without influence; and so she was playing a "bit" in a piece soon to open; she, of many *ingénue* leads, and most difficult juvenile character work in stock and in "number threes"; but, "just as he said in his charming criticisms: 'money, not art, counted nowadays.'"

She smiled up at him with childish wistfulness. Would she have supper with him? She was not quite sure it was quite the nice thing; people talked so, and it was hard enough for a girl to keep her reputation in this profession, even when she never did *anything*; he understood, *didn't* he? But to prove she appreciated the honor, wouldn't he have tea at her little place to-morrow? If he would, she would sing aloud for joy. She had read everything he had ever written and she thought he was too wonderful for words!! Yes—really! He mustn't be so modest. . . . With the consequence that Mr. Dirksmelter formed no very clear idea of what the evening's performance was about. But he would have formed the wrong one anyhow, so no harm was done.

Lest her gross machine-made flattery be deemed too "raw," it must be remembered he had been a critic nearly a season now; hence a conspiracy was afoot to convince him he was quite the most important person in the city. He had been the honored guest of international "stars." Famous actresses sent him monogrammed Christmas presents. Managers seemed to defer to his judgments in casting plays. Long since, he had ceased paying for his own suppers after the show—some actor, playwright or manager was willing, even anxious, to be bored for several hours in addition to paying the bills. Moreover, he had been introduced to subtler systems of flattery: had been invited by two managers to read those unsolicited plays which pour in from all corners of the globe; and in which no manager has ever been known to find a paying production, the real plays coming from agents, or along with letters of introduction. Formerly legitimate salaries had been paid to expert play-readers; but now the managers made sure of reaping at least *some* profit from such salaries; finding them an excellent bait for poorly paid critics. The fish once hooked, it was a certainty he would rise to his new income and then fear to lose it by angering with ill-advised rebukes the holder of line and hook.

Dirksmelter had accepted one such job and was considering another; while a third manager had given him a contract to novelize all successful plays produced by his firm; for which he would receive on each a substantial advance and one-half the royalties. So that, with flattery in such substantial forms, it was not strange he took as his right and heritage the eager admiration of one young girl.

"I have seats just like this for every opening night," he told her, when she expressed her gratitude at being able to see the show "so far down front"—we professionals, you know, always get the back rows—"and," he added portentously, "I never have occupied but one. I'm famous for it.

But then I never met anybody I wanted to take before. If you'd like to go with me, hereafter, until you open . . ."

As she said (to Norman MacKinder, her companion of recent stock days, seated on her trunk in one of those small hotels in the forties), really he was the most ridiculous jay to be seen outside the tank towns, and how he had got to be critic she couldn't for the life of her imagine. Whereat Norman had returned fiercely that she was never to mind what sort of a jay he was; it was their first chance in five years to amount to anything along the Big Lane, and if she couldn't manage Dirksmelter so they did, he, Norman, would know the reason why.

"But, *Norman*," she protested, making a little mouth of disgust. Privately, she had decided to do just that; but she wanted it to seem that she was being forced into it against her own delicate refinement of nature. But Norman only growled. He was quite well aware of this.

"If you could only *see* him!" she went on. "He's got a funny face like a corkscrew, and little piggy eyes, and he wears a funny little pinched-in hat, and a gray tie with his dinner coat. And he's tall and skinny, and has a funny nose and those funny eyeglasses that droop down and look like they're going to slide off—like those cartoons of the 'Common People'—you know. And you ought to have heard him tonight criticising the play about being true to life; saying society people didn't act that way. I was nearly sick from not laughing. Him criticising what was society! It was awful."

"Yes, but it's more awful playing one-night stands, sleeping in your clothes in day coaches or sitting up half the night waiting for the four-hours-late local to take you to the next water tank," growled Norman, one of the idols of those same "tanks"; long and lean of figure and with a handsome, dissipated face. "Or playing two-a-day stock, rehearsing

for next week all morning and studying your part all night—I'd sooner be dead than go back to it. And what chance has a couple like us on Broadway without some pull? 'Tisn't as if we were wonders at anything—there's thousands as good-looking and can act as well. Don't kid yourself you're any Cleopatra for looks; and if you frame up better than the average of these dolls, it's only because I made you can those chippy styles you used to wear. . . . But it seems you've made a hit with this gink, and though he's a natural born idiot and as ugly as Billiken, you just kid him along until he lands you something worth while. . . . And quit that pretending you hate to do it, too. It's just natural born in you women to love admiration, even if it's only from the bootblack on the corner. And, as for leading a man on and laughing at him up your sleeve, you like it better than eating—and the only dames that don't do it are those that're too ugly to get anybody to lead on; and so they pretend they're too good for it—"

"Oh, Norman, how can you have such a low opinion of me?" she asked, shedding tears. "It's those other low women you've had who've given you such ideas. I'm not like *them*, I want you to know." She advanced on him with open arms, but he repulsed her.

"That's what every woman kids herself into thinking about herself and about the last woman," he returned imperturbably. "The only man who gets you right is the one who knows all that stuff's the bunk. The Chinese and the Turks have got the right idea about you—you haven't any souls. Nor any ideas, either, except what we put into your heads. If it hadn't been for me teaching you how to dress and act, you'd 'a' been playing the tanks and flirting with grangers till you got into the Actor's Home. So you do just what I tell you—understand?"

"Oh, Norman!" she said, tearfully, but in accents of admiration. He permitted her caress. "Now," he said, "I'll tell

you how to manage this critic guy so we'll both be wearing diamonds."

IV

HAD Nature given Mr. Dirksmelter even an elemental sense of humor, one glance at his shaving-glass would have convinced him no woman with any choice would have chosen him. But, had he been given a sense of humor, his face would have been a different face. He imagined, of course, that his wife worshiped him as a god, but he did not know how comparatively easy is housework compared to sewing on vests for ten hours daily. He imagined, also, from their flattering attentions, that several well-known actresses concealed an ardent regard for him; whereas they merely wanted what well-known actresses generally want from critics, and took good care never to receive him alone. And, as he was under the delusion that the play-reading and novelization jobs had been given him solely because of his transcendent ability, deeming himself a superior person to whom the entire theatrical world looked to be cleansed of its sins, it was without much difficulty that Bessie Boone convinced him that she was quite mad about him—but his wife stood in the way. If only he were not married . . .

His knowledge of women was of the primitive sort most men possess. There were good women and bad women. Man was the natural enemy of good women, pursuing, luring, tempting them; and was quite unworthy of a good woman's love. Only the love for one, unallied with thought of sex, could make him worthy to "touch the hem of her garment"—any hem. A good woman might love a man desperately, might be willing to die for him; but would never pander to a man's low passions—if he were low enough to wish her to; which "any decent man" was not. Every time a good woman

loved a married man, there was material for a "big throbbing play of genuine heart interest," in Act III of which man, the immoral, weakened under the stress of passion, was brought to a realization of his shameful insults by her calm, lofty nobility of character; expiating his crime in some gallant entr'acte off-stage deed, so that Act IV could show her burying her beauty in a nunnery—or, else, *she* died (on stage), and he swore to prove his love by devoting his great talents to some noble work. . . .

Whenever Dirksmelter saw such a play he waxed fervent in his praise of its "masterly grip of human cross-purposes," "its relentless delineation of the conflict between the flesh and the spirit . . ."

Consequently, Bessie Boone had little trouble in convincing him that any attempts at kisses or caresses were insults. All of which had been accurately foretold by Norman MacKinder, after having arranged to meet Bessie on Broadway "by the merest chance" and to talk to Dirksmelter for half an hour, alone, over several tongue-loosening glasses of whiskey.

But what he had not foretold was that Dirksmelter would carry the joke so far as to embark upon a carefully arranged off-stage climax of his own; telling his wife he had never really loved before, "had never known the meaning of the word"; and that it was "a greater sin to live with a wife one did not love than with a mistress one did"; so, if *she* really loved him, she would prove it by giving him his liberty; for those who really loved would sacrifice all to see the loved one happy . . .

Now Dirksmelter, to his wife, represented all the comforts of home, all the restful security of having shifted the problem of food and lodging, permanently, to another's shoulders; and, as she was now possessed of new clothes—gifts of an uneasy conscience—and was planning ways and means to get her share of all the extra moneys now coming in from play-

reading and novelization, and had picked out a more expensive flat farther downtown, she burst into wild protestations of love that would never die. She had given him "the best years of her life"; she was "the mother of his children"; she "called heaven to witness" that she would "sooner die than see him in the arms of another woman"—that scheming woman who only wanted his money and his fame; whereas she, his wife, had loved him when he was poor and unknown. . . It was no psychic knowledge of Miss Beth Bohun (to be) that prompted the accusation: it was what is always said of the other woman under like circumstance. And Dirksmelter, having never looked on the face of Truth, only on its sentimental imitation, saw no reason to doubt her sincerity. So it was long before he dared break the silence by suggesting he meant to do the "right thing."

At which her heart leaped. To be free of him, to be no longer compelled to listen to him read aloud passages from his own works and pretend to be interested, to be free to patronize moving pictures, which he despised and forbade, to read the bonbon-wrapped fiction which she loved, but could never bring into the house, to go about all day in a kimono and without corsets, and to devote to her children the time necessary to keeping the house and his clothes in what he called order—to be free—yet still to have a home and not to earn it as a wife on salary! The vision was one she had had once when he had been taken down with his annual bronchitis and the doctor had looked grave. At that time she had stolen off to his desk in the next room to stare mechanically at the dancing figures on his life-insurance policy. And for three or four days the wild hope endured; while she worried the nurse with offers of useless assistance, and made him little delicacies which she knew he would not be allowed to touch—favorites of hers that she could afterward devour in secret;

earning the eulogy of the nurse, "the most devoted wife I ever saw: how she loves you, Mr. Dirksmelter!"

But whether she had done these things for fear her secret might be discovered, or because she wished to convince herself she harbored no such wicked thoughts, who can say? But now, facing a realization of her highest hopes, the same mixed motives resulted in a second statement that she would "sooner die"—this time "rather than take a penny of his money." Did he think the *money* made any difference? How like a man! How little he understood a woman's love! She wished he had never had any more than at first—then he would always have been hers. It was the money that had parted them. She hated the money. She would "work her fingers to the bone" to support "his children" (never by any chance hers also) but "accept his money? Never!"

He argued, he pleaded, he implored. Finally, when she saw he was too weak, too hoarse, to argue, plead or implore further, she weakened "for the children's sake"; and, before the evening was over, it was settled that he would give her half of his earnings for the six months she must spend in Reno divorcing him; and would draw up papers at his lawyer's next day, agreeing to pay her something more than a third for the remainder of his life after the decree had been granted. Also he would take out an extra insurance policy, like the former in her favor.

The interview, punctuated by choking sobs on her part, was terminated by a burst of wild weeping, during which she slammed and locked the bedroom door; from behind which he could hear her tragic references to her "poor abandoned babies," who ungratefully protested in sleepy voices against any mid-nocturnal manhandling. All during the night, as he lay on the uncomfortable "library" davenport, he heard occasional repetitions of these various forms of hysteria; and he felt more than ever like a man in "a big throbbing play of

genuine heart interest"; one of those who profess to wonder, hypocritically, why so many women love them so deeply; privately quite sure there is nothing at which to wonder. So following their example, Cadge Dirksmelter cursed his fatal fascination.

His wife's sobs that he heard were real enough now—quite as is the custom of the sex, she was sobbing for sheer joy. At last she could have the wallpaper and the Brussels carpets she fancied and wear the kind of clothes he said were "not fit for decent women to wear." Why, even as she was, she knew she had not lost her fascination—had she not detected tender tones in the grocer clerk's conversation over the wire, and hadn't that book-agent plainly shown his disappointment when he found she was not "Miss"—as he had imagined from her looks? . . .

V.

ON the floor of Congress, if Senator Smith will help keep the tariff on ink-wipers (which the constituents of Senator Jones mainly manufacture), said Jones will reciprocate on pin-cushions, the major manufacture of Smithian constituency. On the floor of the Foyer, Critic Brown discovers that Critic Robinson's friend is an actress of "no mean ability," so that said Robinson may be willing to render similar services to Brownian friends.

So Dirksmelter, having long since made peace with the critical fraternity, which in the case of a success was willing to understand that a man must not hesitate to succeed—Beth Bohun (she was now so styled at MacKinder's command) had been discovered to the readers of Manhattan newspapers, as—(1)—a "young actress of rare charm, whose talents were almost buried in the minor part of 'The Milliner'";—(2)—

"one whom it was my fortune first to see last night, and whom I shall expect to see often again in larger parts if our obtuse managers show even their usual glimmering of perspicacity"; —(3)— . . . "a flapper who did not flap in vain for, even in her attempted obscurity, her tiny chirping rang truer than the cackling of the hens and the crowing of the roosters"—to quote the more prominent self-advertisers. All agreed that here was a pulchritudinous and artistic "find" and it behooved managers to give it speedy recognition.

Personally, F. Earl Abrams, producer of the piece, had seen nothing unusual in Miss Bohun; nor did he, even after reading the reviews—he was well aware of the Dirksmelter connection and of consequent "critical" procedure. But, being Semitic, he resented nothing that would injure business; only sought to twist it to serve his ends. Here was a chance to get gratis publicity worth many thousands—how best advantage himself by it? Rejecting several obvious methods, he remembered he had on his hands a play by a foreign dramatist, the large advance royalties on which would be forfeited, or another huge advance paid, unless it was done before a certain date. He had ordered the piece on the strength of the author's current London success; and on its delivery had cursed copiously on finding it one of those daring affairs that have a single chance of enormous success to ninety-nine of dire failure. It all depended on how the shrieking climax of Act II would be received—an orgy frankly Bacchanalian; and, though the public might be enthusiastic if left alone, he feared fierce denunciatory critical comment, that might bring Police Department censors with orders to close the theater or excise the objectionable scene. And—the fore and aft portions of the play being but an excuse and a reason for that scene—deletion, even revision, of it would leave a sorry piece of dramaturgy.

If only he could start with the right foot—with critical

approval; such had been his despairing cry when he first read the play. And now it seemed that Miss Beth Bohun might be the treadle to set that right foot automatically in motion. So, cautiously, he began investigations; and in the course of the next few weeks each reviewer was caught alone and informed that Mr. Earle Abrams had been profoundly impressed by his notice of "that wonderful little girl, Miss Bohun."

"You're sure the picker right enough," Mr. Abrams would continue jovially; "you for the eye every time. You got me for my little plot, didn't you? I oughta known you'd make her for the genius she is even in a 'bit.' I only put her in so she'd have some small change while she was training for the biggest part the old lane ever saw. When I got the play last year I knew there wasn't a chance for a Broadway woman to look the part—innocence and all that. But it had to be *played*, too. So I started prowling the stock companies from Maine to Augusta, and I was about ready to chuck the piece when I saw this little girl in Gloucester stock. I meant to sneak in on rubber heels, though, and give Broadway the shock of its life. But you go and get me first crack outa the box. Say, don't wise up anybody to what I've just told you, though, and we might put it over yet. Promise." This tale he told everyone but Dirksmelter—to whom he claimed he was giving the chance to the young lady solely because he loved Dirksmelter like a brother; adjuring him also not to tell.

It was on receipt of this information that the great Act III scene of the throbbing human-nature drama had been played; and, a week later, Mrs. Dirksmelter and abandoned progeny were off for Reno, and Dirksmelter was with Bessie planning roseate futures. No longer would his gauzelike wings of genius be tawdried by contact with a drab woman. He would be the husband of one who, though a great artiste, still revered him as the master of her fate, and was humbly subject to

the master's commands and criticisms. Together they would inaugurate a new era in American theatricals. As for the weekly drain of alimony that must be paid for the liberty necessary to inaugurate this Golden Age, that would be made up a hundredfold by the great artiste's salary, which, as her manager, he would handle. True, she was to receive a very small monetary consideration for playing the great part; but it was the chance that counted. Afterward, a hundred blank contracts would be forced on her; and he could resign his position to take his rightful place in the world.

It was about this time that she declared to MacKinder that, future or no future, she would go mad if she had to stand this man much longer—so irritating the actor that he pursued her through her two rooms with fist upraised and violent words outpouring; until, too breathless to dodge around the brass bed longer, she surrendered.

"You let me hear any more of that stuff," her conqueror breathed heavily, "and you'll not only see him, but you'll need a heavy veil to do it in, too. Quit *now*—when everything's framed *right*? Didn't Abrams tell you he was only giving you the job because of the notices you'll get? D'you think he'd let you have it for a single minute if he heard you'd split out from this mutt? You let me hear any more of that and I'll make you think Simon Legree was a gentle philanthropist. . . ."

"Oh, Norman—how can you be so *brutal*?" she whimpered, sidling up to him. "I hate you, you—you sweetest thing in the world, you!" But Norman only shook her off, growling. His temper had not improved in the months he had been idle; he did not relish absence from the public eye; and their savings—in consequence of providing separate establishments—had almost vanished. He, like Bessie, wanted her to be free as soon as possible; but not before she was in a position to

demand of managers that Mr. Norman MacKinder be given leading parts, also.

But Bessie, besides her distaste for Dirksmelter, had a new anxiety—the thought that rapidly slipping away were the six months when she would have no further excuse for remaining other than Mrs. Dirksmelter. And the new piece had not gone into rehearsal until several months after her first New York opening. Only fools make important productions after autumn until the Christmas holidays. They were again delayed that the leading man Abrams wanted might conclude his contract elsewhere. Then rehearsals dragged interminably; and, after weeks of performances to provincials, who, without a New York endorsement, did not know whether to applaud or be shocked, and who, as has grown to be the custom, mostly decided to wait to see it when it had weathered Manhattan's heavy seas, Abrams swore he would lose no more money on the piece; and closed the company until metropolitan "time" could be secured, which gave them another long delay during which those wiseacres who go to out-of-town openings counseled changes as imperative if the piece would live: changes necessitating a native play-carpenter and more rehearsals.

Thus the six months had spent themselves by the night of the final dress rehearsal; and the thought of Dirksmelter with a telegram announcing his freedom caused Bessie to give so abominable a performance that Abrams's friends (not in the secret) counseled him, in the names of several demons and deities, to postpone the piece until a leading lady not positively impossible should qualify. Despite his furious recital of this, the girl was too worn with worry to have done better on the following night, had not Norman MacKinder taken a hand, and, from the early morn of the dress rehearsal until the *première* on the following night, spent the remainder of their savings on a hired motor car and champagne at road-

side inns, with nicety of an expert, building her up to that stage of intoxication where one does not brood, but is not incapacitated: and depositing her in this condition at the stage door. Then he hunted up Abrams, and asked that he forbid anyone to see her until after the performance. When that time came, and the girl had been caressed by Norman and applauded for her evening's work, Dirksmelter, almost distracted by her absence of the day, was admitted and—once she saw he did not carry the dreaded yellow slip that released him from matrimony—was reassured of her love. At which he rushed off to his office to write his famous notice—"the play and actress of the century": that notice which was to be quoted on every hoarding in the city—that would look at him satirically for many months later every time he opened a newspaper—that made him the laughing-stock of Broadway.

For, after the anxious pair had sat up until early morning to read the reviews, they had found Dirksmelter no longer necessary: almost every newspaper proclaimed that her performance of Dionysia made her one of America's most distinguished portrayers of emotion; although many found fault with the "technique" of the play by one of the master technicians of the playwriting trade!! So at last Norman had allowed her to cast off Dirksmelter; writing at his dictation:

MY VERY DEAR FRIEND:

"This morning, amid all this triumph, I was sad. Here I was famous, through no merit of my own, with prospects of more money than I can spend and what all the papers say is a distinguished career. And there is a poor little woman out in Reno who has none of these things: one who has given her life to you and your children. When I thought of her, I felt sure I would be punished if I allowed my selfish desire for love to rob her of the only joy life holds for her; and, although my love burns higher and truer for you than ever

before, I realize now that the greatest love is proved by the strength of character to put it from one if it is wrong; and that poor sad little woman's face would always come between us, poisoning our days and turning our nights to horror.

"I see my duty to her plainly, and that is why all my future success will never bring me happiness. But I am resolved to be strong. There is another man who loves me devotedly. He has agreed, so great is his love, that, as I can never love him in return, he will live with me as a brother if I marry him. And I *shall* marry him—before you receive this note. Why? So that you will wire that poor little woman in Reno before it is too late and tell her to come back home and bring the children to their father.

"Perhaps you will hate me for what I am doing. But there is One Who Knows. And He knows, and He only, how my heart is torn by what I am about to do. But, dear, 'I could not love you half so well, loved I not honor more.'

"BETH."

Dirksmelter, when he received the note, sat in the *Argus* office, waiting to bear Beth the first copy of his wildly enthusiastic notice. When he had read what she had written, the sheets fell from his numb fingers: into which a passing copy boy thrust, as previously requested, the first obtainable copy of the afternoon edition. Mechanically, Dirksmelter opened it: on the rear page, over a Reno dateline, were small headlines announcing that a divorce had been granted to the wife of the well-known critic, Mrs. Cadge Dirksmelter, alimony \$2,500 per annum.

IV. CHARLES CHISHOLM CANTILEVER: "BEST SELLER"

I

IN years to come, philologists and sciolists of the twenty-first century will exchange amazed glances, as, from dusty libraries, they drag down, and attempt to read, the curious popular "literature" of to-day, with its gaudy illustrations depicting idealized peasant girls in silks and satins—bovine creatures of body and lack of mentality, who pass for the queens, duchesses, millionaires' daughters and other highborn ladies whose adventures the public of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries bought in lots of from fifty thousand up. These scholarly gentlemen will wonder what race of men so lacked a sense of humor: and this story is written to assist them, for it proposes to show one of the race—an attempt for which all should be grateful, since publishers do not circulate such portraits plentifully. Nor are publishers any more liberal with biographical information concerning them: the authors would not be able to write such wild tales of adventure and daring, nor such chronicles of the fashionable world, were they adventurers, themselves, or, at least, men of the world.

Charles Chisholm Cantilever was typical of the class; both in biography and appearance. He was fleshy; he was almost bald; and he had never left his native town in the Middle West where he was in the harness trade until his first story had been accepted. At the time he wrote it, "manly" writing was in vogue—stories in which "primitive" or "primordial" occurs frequently, and in which melodrama as weird and

wonderful as any perpetrated on Eighth Avenue is excused because it has the background of "the wild." From a metropolitan editor's standpoint, it would appear that melodrama is thrills in civilization; *drama*, thrills 'mid London's icy mountains; i. e., Jack London's.

Cantilever had written many rejected stories; but one summer an astute literary agent, met at a nearby report, had instructed him as to late fall fashions in fiction. The "wilds" story was the result.

The agent took it to a magazine as old as the history of American letters; whose subscription list, several months before, had seemed to be made up of subscribers quite as old. Despite numerous stories in the very best form in which nothing whatsoever happened; despite the fact that these tales were made up in equal parts of the most careful New England dialect and of "fine writing"; despite more than occasional colored plates illustrating at least one historical narrative in each issue (which the artist often wrote himself around the pictures, historical short stories being hard to get); and despite a scientific article by the very best and very dullest authorities on what the larva of the Coddis-worm looks like under the Great-Horn-Spoon microscope; despite, we say, all these conjunctive portions of sentences, that venerable valetudinarian was losing much money. Its old subscribers were dying and possible new ones said it ought to die, too.

At about this time, there appeared a book about the wilds that was real literature. Regretfully the valetudinarian's sponsors were forced to believe this must be so, for every respectable literary journal affirmed it. In the sponsor's opinion, the story was a trifle low, since things were always happening in it. Furthermore it was not historical, not about New England, and almost totally without conjunctions. But not for them to argue with the best literary authorities! So gradually a vague conviction came that, if they could secure

such a story, others beside men eighty years old might subscribe to their periodical. This had been hinted to the literary agent who now bore them Cantilever's story. It was also a trifle low (men spat tobacco in it and the "damns" were spelt out, indicating "strength"); things happened in it all the time; it was not historical, not about New England, and almost totally without conjunctions.

Since the other tale was literature, this—so much like it in all salient particulars—must be literature also. The valetudinarian broke a half-century-old rule and accepted a story by a new writer. Also, they sent for the new writer and impressed upon him the solemnity of the occasion. Since they had accepted his story he must be a genius: he must strive always to be a genius. Certain crudites (even genius could not be permitted to split its infinitives and say "farther" when it meant "further") must be eliminated. Also, the editor tried to show him that the conjunction was a very gentlemanly little punctuation mark and made easier reading than frequent shoot-you-in-the-eye periods. He was implored to study the work of Mary E. Pinklinham and H. Popcorn Smith, apostles of the divine commonplace.

Also he was urged not to have so many things happen in his stories. Of course, the editor understood that you could not have the new literature of the wild without at least having a timber wolf howl at a Malamoot dog. But why, on top of that, have the Malamoot howl back at the timber wolf? Why not save that for a sequel? One howl was sufficient for one story. Popcorn Smith had done it. Popcorn had written a whole story on how it made him feel to look at an old hat he had worn on the occasion of his only time of voting when he had found the other voters so rough that he went home and wrote a story about them and never voted again. The valetudinarian had printed the story and thought it served the voters right. Cantilever was recommended to study this

story as a masterpiece. True, it was not about New England, but then one couldn't have everything.

Cantilever walked out of the office as a king walks out of a coronation chamber, and soon the cognoscenti were climbing six flights to his studio, sitting under paper lanterns, eating studio delicatessen and talking about their souls. The uglier the men and the scrawnier the women, the bigger souls they had. Cantilever soon arrived at that stage of shame where he could call the cognoscenti to order solely to read them something he had just written. He soon became an adept in taking a very small quarter of an incident, dressing it up in very large words; putting in much dialect and many descriptions of the weather's influence on character, and calling the whole a "psychological" study. After he had published continuously in the pages of the valetudinarian for nearly a year and had been acclaimed as one of the greatest of the "wild" writers, the editor of the valetudinarian advised him to begin a novel which, if written along the lines of his short stories, would receive publication in the magazine and—the imprint of its publishing house. When these things had been done it was acclaimed "the great American novel." A playwright used its title and several of its incidents for a "dramatization"; while the novel, reprinted after various editions in cheaper form, enjoyed a steady sale for many years.

For, in justice, let it be said, Cantilever was no ordinary writer. True, he took seriously everything the public took seriously, but he expressed his sentiments through men speaking the rich slang of the West (then little exploited); the text in contrast to his dialogue, written with that regard for trifling details and in that polished peanut style that passes for Stevensonian English in the "culture" clubs. It was as though George M. Starspangledbanner had taken to novel-writing, using Charles Lamb for his model; or a less suave St.

Augustine Thomas to surrounding his sallies with descriptions.

Soon afterward, one saw pictures of Cantilever in literary magazines, standing before his "pretty country home," or riding "in his new car." Photographers clamored for sittings, free. Some associate editors went up for week-ends to write articles about his life and work. He was a "best seller," but, more than that, he received the praise of the tame critics as an excellent craftsman and delineator of character, none of your reincarnations of Mary J. Holmes and Sylvanus Cobb who imitate Anthony Hope with a Chicago accent. Also, he drew royalties on a play, nine-tenths another man's work, but, for using the trademark of his successful novel, three-quarters his. In a phrase, he was one of the glories of American lithrachoor (as distinguished from literature); but, when he clumsily tried to make love to Molly Macquoid, she was very angry at such a ridiculous little fat man trying to "make fun" of her.

Molly was in love with Ned Winchester.

II

CANTILEVER had known Winchester ever since each had published his first book. The valetudinarian's publisher brought Winchester's out, too, and the two authors had met in the office while waiting for royalty statements. Winchester's book, recognized as a valuable contribution to literature, showed less than a thousand copies sold. Cantilever was almost as sorry for Winchester as Winchester was for him, and the former, insisting on their dining together, had explained to Winchester the faults of his style and system. He had read Winchester's book only because the publisher had sent it.

"You want Action," said Cantilever. "And Love. Something doing all the time. Now, when your man goes out to rob the priest—you should never have him rob a priest anyway: look how many readers you offend that way—"

"But that was the point," said Winchester. "The man was an ignorant but sincere Christian. He finds that the priest has committed a sin and it ruins his belief in Christianity. Then when the priest catches him at the robbery, the man shoots it back, and the priest wakes up to the fact that his life is not his own, that ignorant people to-day are the same as when they prayed to idols, only, now, the priest's the idol."

"But that isn't so," said Cantilever positively. "A priest is a man. An idol was stone or wood. It couldn't *intercede*. The priest *can*."

Winchester gave him up. Cantilever continued triumphantly: "But let that go. I was talking about *Action*. Your man goes to rob. You get your readers excited. But, on the way to the robbery, you have page after page telling how he *felt*. Now, frankly, I skipped that. I wanted to see how he got into the house and whether he got caught or not. *Action*. See?"

"I see," said Winchester.

"Well, that's *one* point. Now about Love. If you'd had him rob the priest for some girl's sake—not selfishly, you see—to give her dying mother some fruit or wine to make her last moments easier—"

"But the priest would have *done that*," objected Winchester, smiling.

"Wouldn't accept it from a Catholic—that would make a hit with your Protestant readers. No, sooner die than take anything from Romish idolaters—something like that. Or if the girl's brother was in trouble—going to jail, say—Hero risks jail himself to save brother. Better still: have *him*—the hero—a Catholic and believe that he'll be damned eternally

for robbing the priest. But Love—Love conquers all. Afterward you could have him won over to the Protestant Church, still by Love. Love and Religion, both. Religion's *good*. I'll use Religion myself, in my next. Then a lot of people'll buy it who wouldn't buy ordinary novels. Look at 'Ben Hur'—millions! See?"

"I see," said Winchester.

"Now about your heroine," Cantilever went on; "she's married and you have her in love with another man—the priest. But *that's* not what I'm criticising. You could have made a *beautiful* story of that if you'd had her cherish her secret all through the years. But *he* knew; he *knew*, because her hand trembled at confession or something and betrayed her. And he loved her, too, but his vows were sacred: that makes a hit with your Catholics. *Beautiful*, see?"

"I see," said Winchester.

"And then she sacrifices her life to save something of his—well—say, some book, religious book—his life's work. Fire! She runs back into burning house, tosses manuscript out of window, he becomes a Cardinal through it; then, finally, they offer to make him Pope. 'No,' he says, 'no, for in my heart I was untrue to my vows. And even yet, a woman is enthroned there. I cannot be your Pope.' See? *Beautiful!*"

"I see," said Winchester.

"Then"—Cantilever paused, exhausted. "Then—well, anyhow, that's the *right* way. But a *good woman deceiving her husband*—a *good woman*—brought up right! . . . No, *sir*. It's not nature. Not a *good woman*. If you could have shown how she really was a *bad woman*, posing as good. But good women don't do such things. See?"

"I've got to be going," said Winchester, rising. "Important engagement." He never allowed himself to be entrapped into a lengthy conversation with Cantilever again.

But they had met on the street when Winchester was in

town during the big-snow season; and to avoid having Cantilever talk, Winchester had told him how cheaply he had bought land in the wilderness. Cantilever had always cherished a desire to be the squire of some rural district, to have a "manor house" with a moat and the villagers touching their caps. And, besides, he was in that frame of mind that results from too many poker parties, too much drink, too much Tenderloin. He spoke sentimentally of the "fresh, pure life of the country." So, when the spring thaw came, he sent up a surveyor and an agent and bought up some hundreds of acres. Later, "a manor house" with a moat was erected, and that summer he took possession.

All this had been some years before: during which he had tried to soften the heart of Molly Macquoid; and she had been equally unsuccessful in bringing her affair with Winchester to any satisfactory conclusion, though she haunted the woods near his house and invited herself to lunches with him. For Winchester had read her eyes long since, and was determined he would do nothing that would give her any hold upon him. At that time, he was just beginning his biggest work: he meant to prove that Nature's cruelties always resulted in great good, shedding new light on history by showing cause as well as effect. It meant solid work and he could not be bothered by girls.

So Molly revenged herself by making Cantilever's life absolutely miserable, torturing him with an ingenuity worthy of an inquisitor. Yet he stayed on and on through the winter season, even through the big snows. He knew so little of women that he believed he could "make her care."

III

"LIFE is a comedy to those who think," said Horace Walpole some centuries since. Ned, being a thinker, got most

of his amusement watching his brother humans take on self-importance (because they had wasted their lives acquiring what would never benefit them), struggling for social and political honors that were the strait-jackets robbing them of what little freedom life had allowed them. And, of all countries under the sun, he found his own the most amusing; for here almost everybody was pretending to be somebody else; with "bluff" and pose, accent and conversation, clothes and houses, servants and motors; putting their souls' prison cells so deep that they never saw sun nor stars, nor anything else worth seeing.

Naturally, such people being in the majority, the public did not appreciate a writer who showed them in prison when they wanted to think they were in a castle. So Winchester contributed only to those periodicals that reached the people who loved the truth; not a hundred thousand in a country of a hundred million. With small subscription lists, these periodicals could not afford to pay high prices. But Ned did not care. To lie outdoors in clement weather, or in the winter high up in his mountain cabin, hours upon hours, thinking out cosmic problems; then, flushed and happy, to seize a pen and write, rejoicing in the rhythmic ring of his sentences, polishing each until it was an individual of truth, conciseness, and lyrical quality—such a life does not leave room for many physical cravings. Ned was not bothered by his body: to him it was but the tool of his mind. It is astonishing, when one really knows how to enjoy life, how little the life of the city means, with its restaurants and theaters, women and wine. Ned found the fish and game the woods and the streams afforded more to his taste than French cooking. He saw scenery more wonderful in sunrise and sunset, drama more absorbing in the play of ideas than theaters could give him. As for women, he had found that they would come into a man's life whether he willed it or not, and, when they

did, the incidents were all the more charming because they were unsought and unexpected. The search for them, with vine-leaves in the hair, he left to the unintelligent who needed false excitement to enjoy life.

Such was Ned Winchester at thirty-five, and the difference between him and Cantilever could not be more marked in anything than in the way in which Molly Macquoid affected each. Ned had noticed her as particularly pretty but had never thought about her twice. Charles Chisholm Cantilever had written two novels with her as heroine; but, when in her presence, found his writing vocabulary too florid for serious use, and he had lived too long in a sentimental writing-world to have any other for a "good" woman. Had she been the other kind, he would have been worse than a bore, for he flattered himself he knew how to handle *them*, not realizing that one of the handicaps of their profession was to endure such as he. But a "good woman" . . . He felt it was the proper thing (as per his novels) to abase himself before her purity and, after telling his sad story, be given a chance to make himself worthy. But Molly never gave him any chance even to tell the sad story: in fact, she was apt to hum tunes if she sensed any elephantine efforts to approach elegies and eulogies. He had lost track of the number of times he had been forced to blurt out a proposal of marriage without any chance to lead up to it, dramatically, by humilifics.

Of Molly, there is nothing in particular to know except that she had been gifted with slow Chinese eyes and a little lazy body of surpassing sensual charm, to which the life of the little backwoods settlement had added a ruddy glow, so that her clear tawny skin was continually alive with color. Her teeth were as white as those of any other of the forest animals; nor did her ideas of life differ greatly from theirs, although she had for a parent the district circuit-rider who, during his brief stays at home, had instilled into her certain

of Mr. Peloubet's able Sunday excerpts. Her mother, of a family that had been *bourgeois habitants* for years, was as respectable as she was dull, but she was wiser than her husband, knowing Molly was not meant to be what she (her mother) called a respectable woman, so wished to shift responsibility to some marrying man. Therefore, she rejoiced at Cantilever's repeated proposals and made Molly pay heavy penalties for rejecting them. She imagined it was because of these that Molly finally accepted and married him: the real reason would have shortened her years by a score.

IV

It was none other than the departure of Ned Winchester to New York for the one reason sufficient to recompense him for the loss of his silences, solitude and scenery: the editorship of *Parnassus*, to which he had been long a star contributor. It had been unexpected: there was nothing to choose between him and his predecessor, both being of equal philosophical and literary stature, both absolutely altruistic in their devotion to high literary ideals, both destined to emerge from contemporary obscurity (so far as public appreciation went) into enduring fame. But an accidental germ intervened and left Winchester a longer span in which to build his pyramid, and, as there was question as to who should instruct and lead the smaller but equally eager disciples, Winchester sacrificed his personal inclinations and returned to the city, to choke after the mountain air in a steam-heated office and to hold his aching head amid the city's noise. His living quarters, overlooking an old Square, were more to his taste: he had a fireplace there and, when he built up a log fire and sat in the dusk looking over the tree tops, he could half-imagine—save when an "L" train thundered across a nearby block—that he was anywhere except in the city he loathed.

Thus he was sitting and thus imagining, forgetting his dinner, when Molly Macquoid re-entered his life.

But it was not the same Molly: indeed, Ned imagined her one of the patrons of the portrait-painter across the hall, in and out of whose studio flitted just such visions in costly furs. The dusk would account for her mistake, of which he rose to acquaint her. But Molly had taken too many chances and risks, had waited too long, to go through polite ceremonies such as his constrained rising presaged. She must put him at a disadvantage, immediately, and women know from childhood that this is done best by throwing themselves on men's mercy. A man welcomes violence from the woman he does not love: it gives him courage to be brutal, irrevocable. But how many miserable ones linger on in chains of pity, unable to refuse anything to those who give all and ask nothing! So before Ned could speak, Molly was in his arms, sobbing bitterly . . . collapsing. . . .

It was an unfair advantage to take. Besides making him feel responsible, Molly intended he should know it was pleasant to hold her rounded body close, to feel her warm, vibrant cheeks against his own. He had never availed himself of previous manifest invitations, thus robbing her of her most effective weapon. So now she made no particular effort to be coherent, forcing him to draw out each word of an explanation punctuated liberally with tears of self-pity and interspersed with frequent iterations of her unconquerable love for him. She had tried to forget him after he went away; but it had driven her only to attempted suicide from which her mother had saved her by snatching the bottle. Then she realized how tragically absurd she had been: Ned might not *love* her; but he did not *hate* her. . . .

"Oh, my dear," said Ned in acute suffering. But she did not spare him, going on in abject humility. . . .

If she could get to the city, at least he would allow her

to come to see him as she had done in the mountains; she had not bothered him, had she? (He held her tightly, hating himself.) But how to get away? She tried once, twice, both times was caught, after the last time confined to her room for weeks. Entered upon the scene one Willard Smith, a traveling salesman, who had loved her at sight and whom, shortly after, her mother thankfully permitted her to marry.

Yes, she had endured even that; but she knew the exigencies of Smith's occupation must bring her near to New York and to Ned. (He groaned, uttering under his breath oaths more awestricken than profane.) And, when they had come to Boston, she had left Smith and made straight for her goal. How she had wanted to come to him then! She had walked to the old Square, irresolute, many times. But no! Ned had only enough for himself. Besides, no suspicion of mercenary motives must taint her great love. Again, what claim had she on Ned? What could *she* give her wonderful lover in exchange for the precious time she wasted? . . .

"Oh, *don't*, Molly," said Winchester in an agony of humiliation that she should so abase herself—which was what she wanted. She was fighting for her own unscrupulously since fairly she could not win.

"Isn't it *so*?" she asked, her tone low and humble.

"No," he returned. "No: what have *I* to give *half* as precious as your devotion? *Nothing*."

"*Yourself—nothing?*" she asked, as one stricken at the indiscretion of a God.

He groaned again. So, she went on, he could see her any night in the show at the Folly Theater. She had waited until she was out of the chorus, until she had attained a part, but every night at this hour she had come by to see his study window light up and his dear shadow fall across the Square. If she might be allowed to come at that time any day—every day if he didn't mind—they could have dinner together

there in the studio before she went to the theater. She wouldn't be a burden: she'd bring the *nicest things*. . . .

"Oh, my God, Molly!" He almost yelled. "*Don't, don't, don't!*"

Her eyes filled with tears. "You don't want me?"

"Want you! Yes, my God, yes! But don't say such things: *burden* and *bother*: I want you—" And then, being a gentleman, he lied: "As much as *you* want *me*."

And, really, he *did* want her. He had imagined the age had been passed for him when one woman could count much more than another; but such devotion from one so lovely had altered his opinion. Always attractive to women, winning them easily enough because of his indifference added to his knowledge of their fundamentals, plus an attractive personality and a positive style of speech despite his cadenced voice, he had yet of late seen too much of the intellectual type. Molly Macquoid came as a breath of mountain air. And she had made it so easy for him to take her: conscience could not interfere. She had left her parents married, and though she had left her husband, was there any way to persuade her to return to him? She was not in a position to demand that Ned prove his love by marriage, nor did she ask him to compromise the standing of *Parnasus*—his first and only ideal love—by any alliance that, to malicious gossiping Philistines, could be called ugly names. After having decided that half a loaf was the most she could get, she had laid her plans, ruthlessly, that there be no slip in her getting that half. There was no way for Ned to refuse. Nor did he want to.

So, soon he was disappointed if she missed a day. She came always at the same hour: between six-thirty and seven; and he had always a table laid for two, and often he would wait until the time when he knew the assistant stage-manager was calling "Overture" along the dressing-room halls, for, sometimes, she would come almost as late as this, snatch a

hurried embrace, rain kisses, and fly back to her waiting taxicab. Almost inevitably she contributed costly luxuries—fruit out of season, salmon such as they caught back home, bar-le-duc guava—and somehow she learned what expensive foreign editions Winchester could not afford to buy and left a standing order with the foreign-publications clerk at Centavo's. No use for Ned to rail and threaten to pitch the things out of the windows: "I've got a right to do what I like with my money," Molly would submit defensively, "and if it gives me pleasure, it's none of your business."

She learned to be silent when she had nothing worth saying—a difficult feat rarely encountered in either woman or man; but in Ned's work and ambitions she had not the smallest interest, taking no trouble to acquaint herself with the reasons why those foreign books were precious. But unconsciously she absorbed his outlook upon life as a comedy, and, having done so, supplied him with marvelous material by recounting the egotisms and inanities of those celebrities with whom her stagework brought her in touch. Indeed, Ned's first stories to gain any wide appeal came from her—stage stories being, just then, in vogue—and enabled him to purchase for her some pretty bits of new-art jewelry.

For Winchester, their arrangement was ideal. It gave him the necessary feminine touch to his life without which he might have been apt to degenerate into the mere snuffy scholar; it did not interfere even slightly with the work to which he had devoted his life; it broadened the work by keeping him to practice and away from theory; and, by and bye, as such things slowly shape themselves, fashionable women, ever on the outlook for new fads, began to discover the obscure shelves on which book-sellers placed his books; and, with the eager air of Columbuses, advertised their discovery, calling him all that he was not, "cynical," "blasé," an American Bernard Shaw,—all that Shaw was not, either. He

declined their invitations to examine him, much to his publishers' disgust.

"Look here," said the publisher—the new sort, a gentleman, a scholar, yet a man of the world with a care for his tailor and haberdasher: "you've got the chance I've been waiting for, that I knew would come some day; and now you won't take advantage of it. What makes public opinion to-day? The Sunday supplements. And who makes the supplements? These smart women. Look how socialism and woman suffrage have been boomed since they went in for it. And now they've gone in for *you*: they'll boom you, *too*."

"I never cared particularly about popularity or money, Sam," Ned replied.

"Damn popularity; damn money," his publisher said violently. "It's getting your stuff across that counts—educating the public up to an appreciation of what's really good. When we do, that means the end of dirty grafting politicians, cheap lying advertisements, Wall Street, and all the sores of American civilization. Isn't that what you're after?"

Winchester nodded.

"Well, then, go to their kettle drums, their pink teas, their house parties, their dinners; they'll make you fashionable. And when you're that, you can spit in the public's eye and it'll say 'Thank you.' The one thing the common people will copy is 'smartness.' The milliner in Keokuk, the manicurist at Curate's, the dressmaker in Sioux City, the store-girls at Lacy's, and the plumber's wife in Meridian, will all read your books, just as they'll wear some outrageous split skirt, if they hear Mrs. Van Punk and Miss De Cheese are doing it. And they'll hear it all right in the colored section of the Sunday yellows. They'll print ridiculous lies about you and illustrate them with pictures of Tony de Bastellane and André de la Foque. You'll have to stand sponsor for every wild theory under the sun, but they'll *make* you, just as they made the

Fabian Giant and the Five Towns fellow, and the French philosopher with the German name. And, without deviating one inch from artistic ideas, you'll cram your wisdom down the public's throat and if they manage to digest one or two thoughts, why maybe next election they won't vote for Tammany and kindred spirits, won't read Cantilever's spring novel, won't call cubists crazy, won't refer to anyone with the ghost of an idea as a 'highbrow.' A half-good novel in circulation is worth more than an all-good one on the bookshelf. You can never see that, but at least you *do* see what an *all-good* one in circulation is. So you've just got to accept every invitation a smart woman sends you. D'you hear?"

It was thus that Ned Winchester paid a visit to his publishers, tailor and haberdasher—each the smartest of their kind upon the Avenue—and the "intellectuals" in smart society had a new sensation, to wit: a tall, thin fellow, outwardly in no way to be distinguished from any other man of their acquaintance save for a longer stretch and width of forehead and deeper set of eyes, commenting casually upon their most cherished ideas as one who approves of toys for children and a belief in Santa Claus. There was no pose to Ned Winchester; his speech held no desperate striving after clever effects, no brummagem "wit" that lies in perverting proverbs and inverting epigrams, no double meanings tending toward the bedroom, no glorification of sexual appeal, no democratic belief in the wisdom or equality of the masses. His creed was simple. He believed the strong should protect, guide, and rule the weak; his motto was, "Service is strength"; his contempt for those born strong who wasted their efforts in providing nobly for themselves was profound: "No strong man can use one-thousandth of what he can get if he is selfish, and the surplus breeds unhappiness for him, misery for those he took it from." Admiring the great Englishmen of literature, the great manly British institutions, he yet loathed

Americans who endeavored to graft British snobbery and accent on our institutions. Reverent to the great German philosophers, he hated those who would try to adapt their socialistic teachings to a country made up mostly of raw material, hundreds of years removed from the European standard of thought and education.

He was a great social success, and his obscure books were republished in a new *format*, leather for the rich, boards for others, and advertised by department stores in complete sets like any classic.

V

HIS *début* in society changed other lives than his own. Molly Macquoid was never sure of finding him home at dusk any more, for then it was that he was on his way to some Plaza or Murray Hill dinner. Nor was she able to go her way happily to rehearsals, shopping, and performances, secure in the knowledge that during the day his editorial duties claimed him, at night his writing. She considered again. Shaw has said that a clever woman prefers one-tenth of an exceptional man to all of a commonplace one. But Molly was clear-sighted, as are most women when it comes to the man they love, and she knew that these days Ned was meeting the best of womankind that America had to show, women as pretty as she, and, more than that, possessing some sort of sympathy for his work that she had not, plus a social position and sufficient money to surround his working hours with luxuries she could not give—a change of climate for every season, for instance, and a residence in many countries. She knew the chances were that she might cease to possess even the one-tenth of Ned with which, hitherto, she had been content. He might marry one of those slender arrogant women whose pictures faced her own on the newspaper page

opposite the players, more than occasionally rendering cheap their more flamboyant type of beauty and attire.

Considering, then, without egotism as before, she realized that there were too few really remarkable men in the world for Ned to escape many blandishments as bold as her own had been. But it would require time to sponge away the loyalty that her own devotion and gifts had inspired when he was (according to Molly's ideas) nobody. So she must act while she still had the advantage over this other superior type of women, unscrupulously advantage herself of his good nature, forge new fetters of pity. In setting about her plans, she considered Charles Chisholm Cantilever's feelings less than she would have those of her lap dog; he had merely graduated from an annoyance to a convenience, and having ceased to serve in the latter capacity, she must rid herself of him.

She was, as I told you, married to Cantilever. It had been a result of her realization that, even did she manage to escape to New York, Winchester would send her back to her parents. He did not care for her sufficiently to incur for life the responsibility of her future; and of this Molly was well aware. More: she doubted even if he cared enough to permit her to visit him if he knew she was married to another man and living in her husband's house, so she had invented the story about the traveling salesman, secure in the fact that there was no one back there in the woods to whom Ned would write and that his path and Cantilever's lay in opposite directions in New York, so that there was little chance of their meeting. That chance she must take, but she had done her best to avoid any other chances. Thus she had refrained from visiting Winchester until it could be done regularly in absolute safety. One of the conditions under which she had married Cantilever had been his promise to put her on the stage, thus rendering her independent of him should ever the crash come. With the prestige of his popular name, he had easily secured her promotion from the chorus after a few months especially as

Molly had endeared herself to the great Bob Ledyard, producer, by working overtime on eccentric dance steps and singing lessons; and her husband could please the artistic costume-designer by paying for most expensive and dazzling frocks the designer dared not suggest to the management. So when given a simple part of the "Carmen" (visual) type, Molly had conquered the front-row Johns and the gallery boys by her bold beauty, her sensational tiger-skin costume that left her magnificent limbs half-exposed, the daring sensuousness of her glances and utter abandon of her body when (with a less spectacular but more experienced male partner who provided most of the terpsichorean skill) she was given the newest Barbary Coast "dip" dance; the fame of which soon carried her name to vaudeville magnates and to society dancers who imitated her at Tango teas and Canary cotillions. And, while the "Johns" down front eagerly discussed their chances of meeting her and sent messages on cards concealed in bouquets and, sometimes, inside soft untanned-leather cases from Griffony's, Charles Chisholm Cantilever sat, fatuously beaming, or lounged, proudly in the lobby and round the horseshoe-circle at the back, thinking himself admired and envied whereas her unceremonious treatment of him back stage led the performers to believe (for *they* never read *anything* but the trade-journals of the profession) that he was that contemptible thing, a stage-husband dependent upon his wife's pay.

But she ignored the "Johns," was blind to the charms of the leading-men and the comedians, and therefore rejoiced the heart of Cantilever. As a matter of fact, she was too busy—she wanted all the pretty and luxurious things that she had had since her marriage, but she wanted love, too, so she had set a certain salary as necessary before she could leave Cantilever, hence worked harder at her dancing and singing, rehearsed almost daily new dances and, at six o'clock each day left Cantilever to a solitary dinner on the plea that she

must practise just before performing and would eat in her dressing-room; hastening instead to Ned.

But, now that Ned's prospects had changed, that he was exposed to manifold temptations, leaving Cantilever was not enough. So she set her plan in operation.

She sent for her rival in the company, a girl who was, frankly, for sale—but only to high bidders, the pride of Sydenham's and other gilded restaurants, and the patron saint of taxi-drivers. To her, Molly explained what she wanted done, giving her a thick roll of bills and assuring her that, in the divorce complaint, the name of the co-respondent would be left blank. . . . And, thereafter, Cantilever when he came back stage seldom found himself allowed to enter his wife's dressing-room, for another girl now dressed there; while the siren whom Molly had paid seemed always hanging about in the wings or behind the backdrop, waiting for Cantilever's appearance and coaxing him into her dressing-room. . . . She was a creature of sinuous curves and these were more generously displayed in her "classic" costume (in which her arms, legs and feet were quite bare) than were Molly's in her tiger skin. Cantilever's was but the weakest of flesh, and, though he adored Molly, she was consistently cold to him. He did not love this glorious hot-blooded woman, but love was not necessary to gain Molly's ends. The night when her rival notified her of an appointment after the show, Molly did not come home to Cantilever. A few days later he was served with divorce papers—quietly, at great expense to Molly—for only the rich can escape newspaper notoriety in divorce suits—and, just as quietly, without Molly's stage name being chronicled at all, a referee heard the evidence and gave her an absolute divorce.

It was that same night she came to Ned after the show and refused to leave his apartment. She could no longer stand the separation, she said—the thoughts of the other women whom he met daily. She had cared for him before

he became famous, would care for him if he were a laborer. Hysterically she told him of her fears, how some fascinating woman would ensnare and ruin him. How could he go on with his work, entangled in social affairs, married to a woman who would interfere? If it were for his own good, she would not care for her poor little self: he might desert her and still she would love him. But had she not brought him luck? Why, the stories she had told him had been the first to be famous. . . . And if he married anyone else, she would kill herself. Why should he not marry her? Her husband was dead—she had had word long ago, but she had not told him because she was not afraid for him—*then*. Always altruistic. . . .

There was really no possibility of escape to one like Ned who believed the strong could protect the weak. Besides, it is not certain he wanted to escape at that time, although later he saw women who might have suited him better—as Molly had known he would; but, just then, he was full of tenderness for her. She occupied the only sentimental corner of his heart, and he had missed her greatly, and no other woman had made him forget the trysts in the dusk. No, there was no excuse he could give for not marrying her; and so, putting off the evil moment no longer—for her hysteria increased in the morning, they went to a little church nearby and were wed.

VI

CHARLES CHISHOLM CANTILEVER is past forty, now, and writes tragic tales in which good women, horrified at grosser men and not being able in their purity to understand those weak victims of physical appetites, turn from them in disgust and send to suicide the men who still worship them. He, himself, has considered every form of self-destruction, but somehow is still alive, and has gone back to the old Tenderloin

life, writing his excuses for nights of puerile debauchery into his novels which, the tame critics say, have "gained in breadth and in deep knowledge of the soul of humanity; depicting life, grim, relentless, tragic, with a master's hand and with intimate instinctive wisdom." But they do not sell as they once did. There are too many disciples of Winchester to parody them—the "young lions of journalism" as the tame critics contemptuously say. Cantilever never knew Molly had been other than one of those same angels of purity, culling him out of her clean sweet vision only because he was not worthy.

But Winchester knows, and is not sure whether to smile or be sad. For, granted her lover, Molly has been an exceptional wife. True, she never reads his books nor makes any effort to understand his philosophy, but she works hard at her work—from which, at his command, any semi-nudity or other sensuality has long been eliminated—and is as busy as a beaver at other times in making their homes beautiful. They have two homes: a New York studio while she performs, and the moated grange in the woods, once Cantilever's, but since sold to them. Winchester only writes now, having surrendered *Parnassus* to a trained disciple, and is scarcely ever at the studio. But he trusts Molly implicitly—she says, because he does not care enough, her one disappointment in life being that she cannot make him jealous. What was Cantilever's poison has been Winchester's nourishment.

Perhaps his life story is responsible for that section of his philosophy where he writes: "Nature always preserves the average: holding the balance with the nicest eye. So, if you be inclined to be jealous of the rich man, remember one whom he loves may, some day, make his life a tragedy: this, because, to be so rich, he had not the time to study human nature and to understand her. While she, on her part, may leave her rich husband, her many luxuries and her scented idleness, and, oblivious to the world's lure of gaiety and gaudery, de-

vote herself unselfishly to promoting the happiness of some poor man who is poor because he has given up his life to an understanding and a love of his fellows. So that any pleasure the rich man's wealth may give him may be equalized by the love he did not receive: any the poor man may have lost may be made up by some woman's unselfish devotion. . . . I think the analogy may be carried through the history of the world and it makes distinguishment between good and evil difficult. What evildoer to one, may not be a benefactor to another? What if one be God's scourge, the other his wreath of bay or laurel? Who knows? Then who shall judge?"

So he has never reproached Molly for her literary creation, Willard Smith, the traveling salesman.



Book IV

BIRDS WHO BUILT NEW NESTS
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BOOK IV

BIRDS WHO BUILT NEW NESTS AFAR FROM BROADWAY

I

THE ETERNAL CYCLE



OME years before Richard K. Rubblejay had seen or heard of Letty Lee, a malignant microbe—having just murdered a man by breeding upon a weak membrane:—hovered pensively over a sugar-bowl; wherein lay the spawn of

a gnat. But, as one, a hardly perceptible black mite, leaped in air, he seemed a giant to the helpless microbe. Soon after, a house-fly, skimming the sugar-bowl, provided the life of the young gnat with a similar tragic climax; and itself soon came to an end through a hungry spider. A longer period of time elapsed; then one morning, while the windows were open, a sudden wintry gust precipitated the spider into the garden, where a hen clucked out of bounds. A week after, when the spider was a forgotten memory, a fox stole the hen—

the same fox whose brush now hangs in what was formerly Mr. Casimir Smith's country home, "Wildwood"; afterwards the property of Richard K. Rubblejay. It was a year after the hen's abduction that Smith was in at Reynard's death. Two more years and Rubblejay was in at Smith's; said Smith having extended his hunting to Wall Street where he was as the fox had been to his own beagles.

Six months later, Mr. Rubblejay went into an obscure restaurant just off Broadway and met Letty Lee. You may urge that the extended history of any other victim of this cycle would prove as profitable. But we propose to be arbitrary and to tell in detail only this one. For this reason and no other, Mr. Rubblejay merits a more extended description than his predecessors: each, like himself, an erstwhile conqueror and whilom victim;—Messrs. Microbe, Gnat, Fly, Spider, Hen, Fox, and Casimir Smith.

I

WE have acquaintance with a critic, who mentally (if one may so misapply that abused adverb) stands upon his head whenever he perceives that better men find their feet adequate; this being his conception of cleverness. This person once found cause for loud lamentation because dramatists and novelists have pictured money-mad millionaires as mentally moribund. "Away with these spineless and untrue miscreations and miscreants," he writes. "Oh, for an author who will draw for us the true character of one of those strong silent men who rule our country and bend the Constitution to their will."

Here is that author; and here is that character;—Mr. Richard K. Rubblejay. He is not a miscreant because he has no imagination; but, also, he is not strong;—any more than Sir Fly or Sir Spider; strong men do not win from the

weak; they are ashamed. He is silent, because he has nothing much to say: those portions of his *cerebrum* and *cerebellum* not utilized for spinning such webs as catch dollars, having withered, shrunk, and almost disappeared. When he drinks, his thoughts take on the color of his flushed face; and he finds exquisite humor in smoke-room stories. In his youth he stumbled, by luck, onto vast quantities of a certain thing dug from the ground; through certain finely engraved documents which became his, as a broker, because certain margins had not been protected. Worthless, then, the enterprise of other stock-holders led Mr. Rubblejay to suspect the stock suffered only because of inertia. Therefore, he loaned those enterprising ones—who were unaware that stock such as theirs was also his—certain moneys to sink on their own private accounts; and, when the yield was certain, he “called” the loans. The loaned money having gone into machinery, and the results being yet too intangible to command cash; the vast quantities passed into the sole possession of Richard Rubblejay.

Thus, you will see what is meant when he is before described as not a strong man; strong men having great hearts. With a fortune obtained from the vast quantities, Mr. Rubblejay was necessary to the circle of intrigue that decides, in advance, whether listed stocks shall rise or fall. Automatically, his money bred money. He bought such luxuries as can be purchased by sheer expenditure; but even such a one as an ocean-going yacht yielded him little except expense accounts. He had not enough time to enjoy one motor car or one house, let alone six of one and a half-a-dozen of the other; his business needed all the concentration of one so limited. However: his brain was less shrunken than those of his colleagues; for, after twenty years of it, he managed to escape; “to enjoy life.” Not society; “damn society”;—he did not want another struggle; another steady eye on the safety-valve;—

"The world," he said grandly, having read "Monte Cristo," "for mine." He had visions of at least one portion of Haroun-al-Raschid's enjoyment:—it took the form of a harem. Ah! he was a wicked boy!

We glimpse him, only dimly, on his world-tour; at each stage hastening; as Yokohama faded away, almost paralyzed by the thought that six thousand miles separated him from the only people who really respect money; instead of regarding one who possessed too much of it as either to be ridiculed or defrauded;—six thousand miles fraught with possible yacht-wrecking storms. He fades. We do not find him sufficiently interesting to view again until he pushes open the door of that obscure restaurant just off Broadway.

II

THERE is no explaining such a night as the one that followed. Its like cannot be arranged, anticipated, or reproduced at will. Occasionally, they happen; that is all. Had Mr. Rubblejay entered Santayana's on any average night, he would have seen some tired-looking girls eating club sandwiches and drinking ale in mugs; some young men, careless of the girls' presence, discussing their different conceptions of "Art"; some others reading books propped up against decanters; yet again those who read for the edification of all professional scandal from that newspaper issued at midnight—for theatrical and racing folk who like to know the worst before they retire.

None other than these commonplace things would Mr. Rubblejay have found; but, this night, Paul Einstein, a sad-eyed frequenter, was glad-eyed. He had his first reason for believing that horses had become sensible to the logic of his faultless "system"; although, truth to tell, the ten dollars he had placed upon a "60-to-1 shot" had been per-

functory. "That's the finish," he had said. Having a sad subconscious knowledge that he had not spoken truth:—that the book-makers would regain the majority of his big "win";—he determined, it should serve at least to lay a foundation of future credit: and proceeded to put under obligation every regular patron of his favorite tavern. So, when Mr. Rubble-jay entered, in pursuit of a brilliantly beautiful young woman, he saw her, and many others, grouped about one table that but recently had been four; what passes for a silver bucket standing with its Broadway concomitant of green bottle-neck peeping out of ice, beside each chair.

"And, say, you two"—Mr. Einstein addressed on their entrance two young men whom often he had heard define Art to their own complete satisfaction. "Coupla chairs, Billy. My treat, boys, I win \$600 to-day."

They required no urging. They would have sat less with art and more with girls had they been able to pay for other food than their own and the girls understood this and made them welcome: their bankruptcy made them brothers. Brothers, too, the men of the propped-up books; who wrote many more magazine-stories than they published, an occasional vaudeville playlet, or, perhaps, like Burton Jarvis, a play that had failed or that was bringing in only enough to keep one alive until another should see the boards. Likewise of the fraternity were the readers of nightly scandal, the small-part actors and the boys who bet on races, existing, meanwhile, by the sale of "tips" to people who knew almost as little of logic as the horses. The girls, themselves, were in the chorus of the "big show" at the Broadway corner; or they were playing parts at the "highbrow" theater just over the way; positions paying well in the first case, badly in the second: the same amount in each. All patronized Santayana's exclusively because club sandwiches at fifteen cents, and chicken dinners at forty, are not to be had everywhere. To-

night, however, expense was no object, and Mr. Einstein's "table" gorged itself on all the other tables, until, stranger or no stranger, it really would not do for one to sit alone like a wrecked sailor on a raft or a lost soul outside St. Peter's gates; so uprose Einstein and bowed to Rubblejay. "I don't know you, Mister. But you can't give any solitaire sessions here to-night. You're spoiling my party. Come on over here—Billy:—a chair for His Nobs."

Despite the offensively familiar appearance of this address, it was music to Mr. Rubblejay; who was tired of bended backs and concealed curses, showy subservience and silent scorn. Unless he was spending freely, he had found that servants grew careless and guests yawned. The high rank which he arrogated himself through possession of so much of the world's standard of quality, made him too completely the egotist to lay this to his lack of genial qualities, his complete ignorance of the art of any entertainment unallied with disbursal. As for sympathetic listening:—when he was not desirous of quoting those statistics which were his biography; he found that he had mislaid any mental yard-stick by which to measure achievements or ambitions not concerned with the pursuit of money. Therefore, when not tipping servants, he was paying for friends. When doing neither, he was avoided; nay, shunned; except by a third class,—card-sharps, adventurers in general; who took by some form of stealth what he had not meant to give.

He saw none of these at the table before him; only young girls flushed and prattling to young men eager of admiration and speech. As for Mr. Einstein, after urging Billy to put "it" on the table if he had not another bucket, he turned immediately from Rubblejay to continue his attempt at the fascination of Miss Letty Lee. The young man who sat opposite was not concerned; which annoyed Letty. She was that young man's personal property and it behooved him to

show jealousy. That he did not, was one strong reason why his hold upon her was so absolute. He was that Burton Jarvis who had written an unsuccessful play; which, published in England, had won the praise of Shavians and Fabians;—much the same thing. Jarvis was far more interested in a conversation about the great Irish genius than he was in Letty's admirers. Moreover, the young reporter,—one of those who talked about art,—had seen the Jarvis play and was voicing a belief that he *should* call Jarvis *Maitre*.

"Can all that stuff," said the young playwright, laughing. Academic in his prose, with a degree from the most catholic of American universities, he could afford in conversation to embrace the colloquial. Moreover, he was applying to that vernacular known along Broadway as "wise-cracking stuff" the rhythmic method of John Synge. If Synge could make music of Irish peasant's speech; Jarvis had far-better material in picturesque Tenderloinese, admixture of thieves' patter and the word pictures of limited vocabularies. However, he did not permit Letty so to speak and he frowned when he heard her say to Einstein that something was a "quince, a sour one." Immediately, she remembered: "an absolute failure, I thwould thay," she amended hurriedly. She lisped slightly when her speech was hastened. She was the brilliantly beautiful young woman Mr. Rubblejay had followed; and she had refused more invitations to rich men's suppers than all the other company girls had a chance to accept. Mr. Rubblejay watched her and something caused by neither excessive food nor drink thumped heavily within him. He watched Letty in a sort of dull happy daze as might a dog on finding a kind master. There took hold of him the same desperation to distinguish himself that had compelled him, as a boy in full sight of a pig-tailed miss whose affection he craved, to lower himself into a very deep well. For—since these people did not know he was Rubblejay, therefore could not be conniv-

ing;—the brakes of mature suspicion and mistrust were thrown off, and the heart of the Rubblejay at that table, while encased in the thin dyspeptic torso of forty-five and the seventy-five dollar fluted and frilled dress-shirt of a millionaire, was again the heart of an adolescent boy. It proved this by playing him a boy's trick.

"Waiter," it dictated to his tongue, "do what the gentleman says, but, hand the check to me this time." . . .

"You're a good-fellow," said Mr. Einstein. "Mitt me, old kid." He held out "the mitt" and shook Rubblejay's heartily. "But you're with *me* to-night—"

Rubblejay argued the point with all the solemnity of a college child just elected to a "frat." He was conscious of the brilliantly beautiful one's gaze. He had attracted her attention. He was *somebody*, now. A *man*; not just a fellow at the table. Nobody else had thought so brilliantly and achieved so efficiently. For Einstein, realizing that the obligations now lay heavy upon all, yielded the point to "Papa." Rubblejay was not sure he liked that "Papa"; so he said: "Paul: call me *Dick*." The speech was intended to be light and airy; and was fully as debonair and natural as a septuagenarian learning lawn-tennis or polo; but he managed to deliver it and that was something; for it encouraged him to mental aviation.

"*You* call me 'Dick,' *too*," said he to Letty Lee. It was the sort of thing he might have said when he and the girls of his dancing-school class, carrying their pumps in little green bags, held hands in secret corners. Letty laughed. "All right, *Dick*," she said. "Here's to Dick, boys and girls."

But she sipped her champagne, only; for Jarvis let casual eyes rest on her glass; and she knew that if she exceeded his instructions, he would rise and start home, her following, to him, apparently a matter of no moment. Therefore, she would have deserted a Delmonico banquet to beat him to the

sidewalk. "Dick" was looking at her, too; *not* casually. She turned as soon as Jarvis looked elsewhere.

"Good Lord," she thought, with the unerring knowledge of alert women; "that funny old Dick is stuck on me." Such is the savagery of youth that forty-five seems very ancient indeed; too ancient to possess any other than comic emotions. She had three: amusement that an ancient should love; the satisfaction which comes when women are reminded of their power; and, third, the fear that the gentleman might show his feelings too plainly and earn her the contempt of Jarvis for encouraging such "an old guy. But that's a woman!"—he would continue: "no matter *who* or *what*: so long as it's *admiration*."

To which, in the earlier stages of acquaintance, she would reply: "But I'm not *like* other girls"; until he pointed out to her that the remark just made was absolute proof that she *was*. "You women all kid yourself you're different; whereas, if horses ran to form like women, I'd be a millionaire." This was no pose with the young man. After boyhood had bumped out idealism of the feminine, his handling of women had been instinctive. Indeed, it is very doubtful, had it been otherwise, if he cared enough about them to perfect himself in what, if studied, is as baffling as roulette.

III

MR. RUBBLEJAY thought joyously: "This is Bohemia. Here is the real thing." It was, but Mr. Rubblejay was not of it. He was as one who witnesses in a moving-picture reel all the accidentally caught intimacies of another person's home. "They like me for myself," thought Mr. Rubblejay. They neither liked nor disliked him. They were enjoying themselves and he was not interfering; so they hardly knew he

was there. Had he been content with a position so inconspicuous,—the only one to which he was entitled by a mentality actually much below the average of these young people—and preserved his *incognito*, he might have returned to frequent Santayana's, and found, in exchange for a discreetly bought meal or two, or an occasional round of drinks, a certain charming *camaraderie*. Bohemia tolerates such harmless ones and borrows their money; giving in return friendship and sprightly conversation. But such honorary members must be content to play audience, to listen, approve, and never intrude the standards of the Philistines. So conducting themselves, they will be looked upon as human and no true vagabond would do to them a wrong any more than to a brother artist. The loans *are* loans.

But few complete egotists with Fortunatus purses are content with part so humble. So Rubblejay had another spasm of Haroun-al-Raschid-ism. These people liked him for "himself"; they would be rewarded by finding that the erstwhile silent stranger was the great and good Rubblejay the 1st; who would not scorn them; nay, he would be their august patron. It did not occur to him that if the world rewarded his small efforts with a thousand times as much money as those of these brilliant young people, then either money must be a faulty standard or the system insane.

It was a genuine evening; a warm glowing disk against his dull gray unimaginative life. Never were funnier stories told; never prettier girls to dance with; never dizzier rag-time "beaten out of the box" than that of young Louis Schanze; who was yet to introduce into syncopation "Lohengrin" and the "Valkyries Ride" and win international fame. Louie was only a piano-player at rehearsals those days with an occasional interpolated song when "hit" numbers "fell down." Oscar English, now whirling to Louie's music, was a "small-part" boy; a great dancer having yet to break his leg and

give this young understudy a first-night in New York introducing the newest *Tango* and winning lasting fame. Oscar's partner, on the night in Santayana's, was Letty Lee; they improvised some sort of *Apache* as they went along; until the rest ceased dancing to watch them.

And there was Charlie Doty, who was to be a comedian of sorts in London; Milly Vane, the "original" Ghostly Pierrot in 1908; Hugh McVeigh whose funny trifling and successful farces were to make him detested by these very comrades for abandoning less profitable but more enduring dramaturgy—many more, some still unknown, but none lacking the qualities that would some day make for either fame or notoriety. And Burton Jarvis, who was to be called "the American Shavian."

It is small wonder that Richard K. Rubblejay had his eyes opened to the possibilities of enjoying life. There were gathered in Santayana's such a crowd as fills the dreams of the lonely amateur in letters or stage-struck aspirant. Like the scent of the roses, the memory of such a night pervades many days that follow; but at dawn the jar is shattered, the bottle broken. Chance . . . is the potter, the glass-blower.

Most of the party could afford to be poor for their work was their pleasure. They welcomed such evenings when they came naturally; then forgot all about them. It was not so with Rubblejay. He had hated his work and quitted it. He now lived for pleasure. And as this was the ideal pleasure, he must have much more of it by virtue of his divine right as Rubblejay 1st, al Raschid of Broadway. He announced this fact by arising in his seat and commanding the company to sup with him in a private room at a smart supper place, a day or so following.

"And now," he said, "taxicabs and we'll all go to Demarra's."

Had he been sensitive, he would have realized that his speech was like a gusty squall bursting upon a garden sweet

with rue and roses; dissipating that scent, leaving only arid air. Demarra's! They knew it: a silly bestial place, with entrances pretentiously guarded that ignorant sight-seekers might believe its hidden delights to be for the elect. Under the dim lanterns of its artificial pergola, sat women to delight amateur Aubrey Beardsleys; dead whitish yellow of skin, Egyptian of eyes; made up in imitation of the pornographic Paris posters; hired dancers who pretended impromptus; and, for patrons, young collegians and respectable fools who imagined that they were seeing life.

"And, afterwards, Chinatown?" asked Jarvis, coldly contemptuous.

"Sure," said Rubblejay, "to finish off a big evening."

His auditors divided into two classes, immediately; the first despising him for ignorance; the second, studying him for future profit. An almost imperceptible motion of Jarvis's eyelids told Letty she could not go. Her "good-bye" reduced Rubblejay's satisfaction by three-quarters.

He urged and he pleaded. Burton Jarvis got his hat and coat, bade all a cheery "good-night" and sauntered forth leisurely, whistling, care-free. Letty caught him half-way down the block. She was bursting with desire to tell Jarvis "that funny old Dick" was "dead in love" with her; but he offered her no encouragement. So Rubblejay was not mentioned until the next morning.

IV

It is impossible for outsiders, who live carefully conventional lives, to understand the life that is lived by the younger people of Broadway; and, sometimes, by the older ones, too. Therefore, having identically opposite ethics, it is ruinous for outsiders to attempt to fraternize with them. The righteous

bourgeoisie speak of Paris as that horrible place where students, artists, and boulevardiers have conspired to defeat the marriage vows. If as free speech were permitted American literature as French, these good folks would discover that, where people of the stage and the arts hold forth, more self-respect is lost through marriage than through its lack. Such people generally begin lives with marriage, being enthusiastic; divorce follows promptly; and, thereafter, they live in a continual state of Meredithian experiments; beginning generally, when young, unknown, and lonely and, finding such are not frowned down in their world, continue. But, in them, there is no more of the licentious, the libidinous, or the lecherous, than in the marriages of young people in more conventional surroundings. And they endure as long; the pact is seldom broken; although, often, through enforced absences "on the road," or abroad, it stretches slowly until, tenuous, its snap is hardly perceptible. Quite as often, should one or both parties become well known, it is found inconvenient and the couple marry. Some day someone will write the "La Bohème" of Broadway, and Murger's poets and grisettes will become an unhallowed memory.

For all practical purposes, therefore, let us consider that Letty was Mrs. Jarvis when, next morning, she handed a cup of coffee to the young playwright. At the same moment, the telephone buzzed rebelliously, an orange-stick preventing its ringing. She put down the coffee and took down the receiver. It was Rubblejay who spoke from afar.

He had obtained her address from one of the other girls; he was sending her some roses; and would she lunch with him. Who was it? Why, Mr. Rubblejay: Richard K.; "Dick";—didn't she remember?

To Jarvis, drinking his coffee, she repeated the invitation, hand over the telephone. Jarvis smiled and lighted a cigarette. "Say, 'yes,'" he advised. Letty gazed at him in

mournful dissatisfaction. Was this love?—permitting her to lunch with another man? Jarvis raised his eyebrows and wanted to know why not? “I love you, Letty; and love is trust,” said he, sipping. “I’ve got work to do and you’ve got an idle day ahead. Why not lunch expensively and ride through the Park in a motor?”

Letty shot him a scornful glance. “I can’t go, Mr. Rubblejay,” she said imperatively. Jarvis jumped and spilt his coffee. “Rubblejay,” he gasped. He put a finger lipward. “Wait a minute,” said Letty into the telephone.

“*Rubblejay*,” said Jarvis impressively; “*Rubblejay—Richard K.?*”

“Richard K. Rubblejay,” she repeated parrot-like.

“Such a stupid ass to be worth a hundred million,” wondered Jarvis. “It only shows you, Puss, what I’ve always said about money. . . . See here: that changes things. He’s wild about you: I saw by his face—”

“Oh! he’s stuck on me, all right, all right, the old jay,” said “Puss”; then into the telephone: “Yes, yes, just a minute, Mr. Rubblejay.”

“Tell him all right then,” said Jarvis in a tone that permitted of no contradiction. She obeyed. “He says he’ll call at 12:30 with his car. . . . A whole lot you care about me.”

“Don’t be a fool, Puss,” he replied. “I’m going with you.” While he smoked, he outlined a campaign against Rubblejay, grinning mischievously. Even if there had been no chance for gain, Jarvis would have welcomed a passage-at-arms with a Wall Street conqueror; if only to prove his contention that their money-making ability was not due so much to great brains as to little; “just like popular song-writers and best-selling authors,” he said.

So, when Rubblejay was shown into the little apartment off Gramercy Park, he found Mr. Jarvis lounging there and Miss Lee looking distressed. “I already *had* an engagement

with Mr. Jarvis," she said, unhappily. "Can't we take him along Mr. Rubblejay?"

He said he would be delighted, but he did not look it. During the luncheon, at an appropriate moment, Jarvis commented upon the splendor of a ruby-ring that woman nearby was wearing. Letty, as an actress on a cue, put forward little bare hands devoid of ornamentation. "I wonder how it would look on me," she mused: "I never had a ring." Mr. Rubblejay coughed, choked, grew red in the face; Jarvis stared away. "If you'd permit me," said Rubblejay in a low tone. Letty looked shocked. "Oh, Mr. Rubblejay"—"Dick," he amended. "But I can't—I really can't—call such a great man 'Dick,'" she murmured ingenuously. "It was different last night when I thought you were just one of the boys."

"That's all I want to be," said the great man, with ponderous levity, "just one of the *boys*."

"But—about the ring—I just couldn't think of it," Letty said. "No, indeed; oh, no!"

Somehow, between them, however, she and Jarvis managed to confine the conversation to jewels; so that Rubblejay had small chance to forget;—not that he wished so to do. They drove to Griffony's, afterwards, and thinking himself very arch and sly, Rubblejay wished Letty to pick out a ring to send as a present to a certain young lady. "Oh—who is she?" asked Letty ingenuously. She could say such things, outrageous to common-sense, with that lisp of hers. Jarvis, who knew stones, silently guided her eyes to the most expensive ruby in the showcase; but, as Rubblejay had it charged, he was not to realize what her ingenuousness had cost him until Griffony's semi-annual statement.

Jarvis then allowed his rival to see her home. He said "good-bye" sulkily; did not offer to take Rubblejay's hand; both these rudenesses so very apparent that they delighted the older man.

"That Burt!!" said Letty in a vexed tone as they drove southwards. "You know—just because I'm engaged to marry him, he thinks I ought never *look* at *another* man. And what makes it twice as hard:—if he gets really angry with me, he won't give me the part in his new play he promised. And, oh! if you could realize what a chance to get out of the chorus means to a girl like me!!"

Thus Rubblejay was led to believe that her engagement to Mr. Jarvis was largely due to the fact that he could assist her to higher things in the profession. Letty parroted some of Jarvis's pet remarks about art in acting; proving to her admirer that she was an intellectual little person;—*with* a soul. None of your daughters of joy, but a serious young woman who had strong desires to do worthy things in worthy ways. She twanged this string so loudly that Rubblejay lost the courage that had prompted his purchase and feared the gift of the ring would be misunderstood; so that he was on the ultimate verge of departure, the ring still upon him, before she realized she had better be ingenuous again.

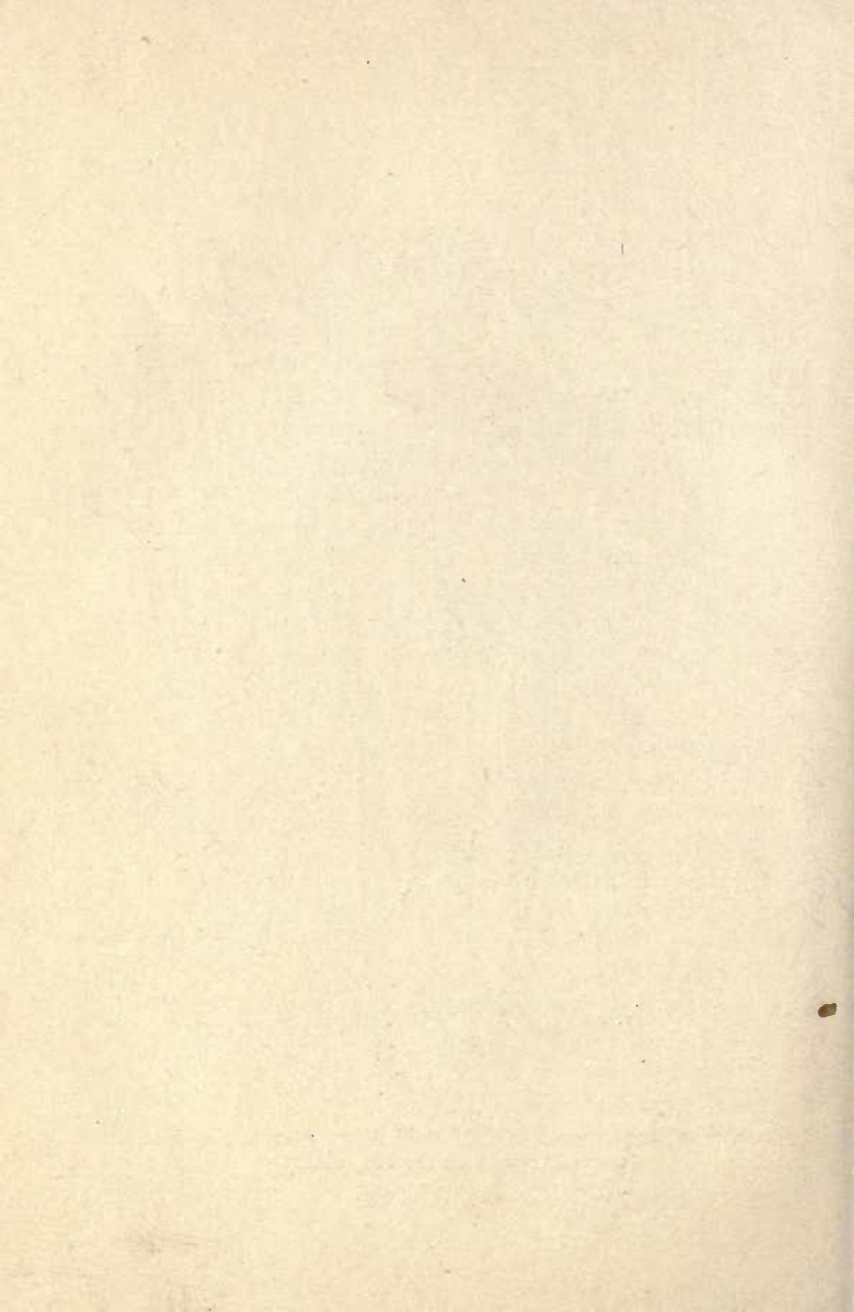
• "Do tell me who's it for: please?"

Next to a caress, which he did not dare, a gift was the next best thing to relieve the overwhelming tenderness her fresh young face inspired. Without a word, he thrust into her little hands the soft case of untanned leather and, incontinently, fled, lest she should hurl it back. Instead, she sat down, breathing hard, and, the ring on her finger, kissed it a dozen times.

"Oh! you beautiful thing, you," she said passionately; and, presently, sobering, her eyes held deep calculation: "Thousands of dollars—as easy as that. Gee!"



Jarvis, who knew stones, silently guided her eyes to the most expensive ruby in the showcase.



V

BETWEEN the gnat's decision and the microbe's death there elapsed not even a second; but the fly manoeuvred a minute; the spider spun half-an-hour; the clucking hen enjoyed a cross-country chase, even longer, while Reynard reconnoitered two whole nights for the hen: Him, Casimir Smith lost twice on false scents; so that his capture involved the better part of two hunting weeks; while Casimir himself was allowed the freedom of Wall Street nearly a month before Rubblejay got him.

Just as the details of these matters are dim, so are some of those in the case of the cycle's later swing. We observe Rubblejay smiling fatuously as he leaves the Gramercy Park apartment after the incident of his first gift. He fades again, until like the Cheshire cat only his grin remains. When we have new light, it is upon an apartment in certain "mansions," Thames Embankment, City o' London; and no Rubblejay is there; only Burton Jarvis, the only American dramatist who has been performed at the new Repertory Theater. He is asleep; although the knocking at his door finally proves too much even for a man who has survived the dress-rehearsal and première of his own costume-play.

It is the lift-man. "Sorry to disturb you at such a silly 'our, sir; but this lady insisted you would not mind." This was what he had intended to say, but he had no time; for Letty had been in Burton's arms since the "Sorry." Jarvis gave him half-a-crown and bade him wake one who will bring coffee.

"I couldn't stand it, Burt"; said Letty penitently, when the door closed. "It was too awful; you away and that awful person hounding me night and day. I even got to hate his presents; although now I'm rid of him I don't hate them so much. In fact, I love them."

She had opened her jewel-box and poured its contents on the bed-covers which Jarvis had resumed. The sight banished all remaining sleepiness. There was a necklace,—a heart the size of a butter plate, a horse-shoe that would have shod a Shetland,—all of diamonds, the necklace containing one hundred stones. There were earrings and bar-pins and bracelets in which diamonds predominated. The solitaire ruby had company; two huge cabochons:—a sapphire and an emerald; and a Marquise edged with these latter, cut square, had for its double-isosceles triangle a pure-white diamond . . .

"Four thousand just for that one alone. Altogether,"—she considered, wrinkling her pretty brows: "Thirty thousand, at least," she said triumphantly. "He was determined to buy you out, Burt. I didn't ask for half of them. They would come with notes; silly notes; like this." She snapped a bundle out of the gold-fitted portmanteau she carried. "And he never even got the chance to kiss me. I don't think he dared. Once he tried to hold my hand. 'That's no good,' I told him; 'no sense to that until you *make* me care for you.'"

"These strong men always believe they can *make* women care," murmured Jarvis, dazed but amused: "As well try to move a mountain as a woman who doesn't love you of her own free will."

"Of course, *you* know that; but then my darling's so clever." She kissed her darling, and he patted her hand. She continued: "As soon as you sailed he began doing all that." She waved at the jewels. "Did you read the note?"

"Why, what a damn' scoundrel!" remarked Jarvis with an air of surprise; "also what a damn' fool!" She peeped. "Oh! that's the note where he says he'll *make* his wife get a divorce. Isn't he a rat? He told me if she *didn't* divorce him, he could easily pay people to swear to things that would make everything easy for *us*. Him and me! Can you imagine it? Do you *wonder* I beat it away from him? It was worth all

these things just to listen to him rave. And, anyway, I *couldn't* stay away from my darling—any—longer. . . .”

As she sobbed on his arm, Jarvis blinked his eyes. “You could have had millions,” he said, thoughtfully.

She cocked her head, bird-like, and peeped up with one eye: “I couldn't have you,” she answered him. He kissed her with real warmth; the separation of more than a month had saddened him several times when he had every reason to be glad. This proof of the extraordinary value she had placed upon him heightened his admiration for her. He took her hand. “We've been together more than a year, haven't we?” he said. “Then, you were an ignorant little chorus-girl with your pretty little head swelled by fools' flattery. Now you turn down a millionaire, because even his compliments bore you. Shall we get married, Puss? The play looks like a hit.”

As she had urged his favorable consideration of this matter many thousand times, she now wept for joy. He, sincerely touched, caressed her with a fervor foreign to his nature. Such men succeed with women because, having for continual company many hundreds of mental heroines, they understand that one woman is very like another, given that she be pretty, adaptable and loves greatly. And Burton Jarvis knew so much about human nature that he could write nothing but comedy.

But “Puss” had made herself invaluable to him in many, many ways; and when he reflected on the trouble he had in training her and others who had not assimilated education so rapidly, he knew he would never feel that he had the time to devote to training another:—there were so many plays in his head that even when he had written for his allotted span, he would die with many forever locked up there. So he thought it best to make this companionship permanent and settle his woman-question for all time.

It was with a certain relief, therefore, that he went to St.

George's and was united in bonds of holy matrimony with Petra Tschudy; which happened to be Letty's name before she had a stage-christening. Both of them had completely forgotten Richard K. Rubblejay.

VI

BUT Rubblejay had forgotten neither of them and was crossing at that minute; bribery having finally opened the lips of the hall-boy who had put Letty's trunks on the taxicab to the steamer. If the Jarvis wedding was recorded in the Marconi newspaper on board ship—which was doubtful, Burton having yet to achieve his great name—or if there was mention of it anywhere, later, Rubblejay either failed to hear or the name Petra Tschudy meant nothing to him. He found no trace of her at any hotels, but knew the Jarvis address since he had once mailed a letter for her. To it, then, doggedly in the dusk of London he made his way. As he approached Letty was sending her newly-engaged maid down to the Embankment where, in a fog that was turning to a cold drizzle, hundreds of shivering men and women stood lined-up; waiting their chance at the wedge of bread and cup of coffee, both very thick, that is given there, nightly, to those who sleep in penny dosses or nowhere at all. The maid's apron was full of copper pennies.

"Give them to everybody in line until they give out," Letty directed. She had brought them in her dressing-bag from the money-lenders at Charing Cross. They represented a brooch which she had never liked; "ugly thing"; she said. "And I just can't stand seeing those poor people night after night and not doing *something*."

Privately, Jarvis decided he had done well in marrying her. He confessed to a similar inability to endure the sight

of so much suffering without a personal attempt at mitigation; told how he had gone along the line asking many if they had places to sleep. As none had answered "yes," his change had not lasted long. "Of course *some* had," he understood that, "but how was I to *know* which ones." Letty kissed him. At that moment the desk-telephone rang and Mr. Rubblejay was announced. Her apprehension of jealous hatred, her fear of hurt to Jarvis, kept back any words and her silence was construed as assent by the hallman below. Rubblejay must have alighted at their floor before she found words to warn Jarvis.

"Let *me* handle him, Burt," she urged tremulously; "I'll get him away." She did not dare express fears for Burt's safety lest he remain. As it was, he found the incident only a vexing trifle, saying: "Bother, who'd have thought he'd turn up?" and was willing enough to shift the task of opening the millionaire's eyes. He, too, had forgotten Rubblejay had a heart to break; to both of them he had only a fortune to spend; his aura was but a huge disk of gold. As for Letty; vanished was the sweet womanliness that had prompted the sale of the brooch, the kittenish purring that marked her relations with Jarvis. She was annoyed at what she considered an alien's intrusion: since her married state would not permit her to use the millionaire in the only capacity for which he seemed fitted. She had but too willingly judged his worth by his own standard of money. She wished him to go and go quickly; yet she dared not tell him of her marriage. She remembered vaguely of men's shooting the women who had deceived them; shooting the other man, too. The way she tried was pitifully inadequate; telling him that she had found love for him impossible and, so, fled.

"To Jarvis," he thundered; "to your—lover"; "a little whipper-snapper whelp:—when I offered you an honest man's name: a name that means something in America, in the world;

when I could have given you everything. And I find you *here*—in his apartment—his—and who is *he*? what can *he* give you—*nothing*—NOTHING, while I would,” he groaned. “Even now. Don’t tell me anything. I love you. Even now, marry me.”

“You know you’re married,” she said fretfully. “Please go.”

“I told you I’d *fix* that. My wife’s been nothing to me for years. Never was, really. She had money: I got my seat through her: she’s ten years older’n me.” He spoke the truth. This was his first genuine emotion. He had sacrificed to “getting on” even the chance for romance that lies through marriage with one’s well-beloved and Love’s children. In days past, his business had tired him too thoroughly to leave fuel sufficient to feed the fire of a passion. But he had been idle a year now; and for three months of it his business had been Letty. His wife—that hateful drab woman—seemed an unreasonable obstacle. This child could be taught to love him. He did not doubt Letty cared *something* for him; his belief was that she had gone because she saw in him no ultimate marital chance. He redoubled in speech the assurance he had already written.

“I tell you I’ve got the people ready to swear against her: her own maid, her chauffeur, her butler—”

Jarvis in the next room had divided his time between listening, and watching Letty’s *largesse* being distributed to those shivering misérables down on the Embankment. The connection between such derelicts and Rubblejay, plainly effect and cause, had caused him to burn with hatred at the sound of the millionaire’s voice. Actually, he desired to hurt the fellow: to make Rubblejay pay not only for his own share, but for all his fellows responsible with him, for so much unnecessary misery. This final treachery against his wife

was the flame that hardened Jarvis's heart like steel. He stepped out.

"That is going to cost you just one hundred thousand dollars," he said coldly. He held up his hand for silence. "You wrote out all the details of that pretty little scheme. Letty gave me the letters—"

"Good," said Letty, clapping her hands. "It serves him right."

Rubblejay stared at her in dull misery; only half-understanding. But she, remembering the annoyance he had been to her, had become suddenly vengeful, too. "People like you ought to be made *suffer*," she said. "If you knew how I hate you." She ran to Jarvis for protection, suddenly realizing how groundless were her fears for his safety; he so strong, Rubblejay so weak, "yes, hate you. I was in love with Burt when I met you. We fixed it up that day to make you buy that first ring; he's so smart and you're such a fool. Care for *you*? You're like a snake to me. If you *touched* me I'd scream."

Like some prisoner of the Inquisition searching for pity the eyes of the torturer racking him, Rubblejay was unable to remove his dull gaze. Yet, actually, her arms were about Jarvis, her lips against his cheek, her mouth full of words of affection for him, hatred for her benefactor. Finally, he realized. "Played! played for a sucker," the words came back as he remembered an experience at show-girl hands of some other Wall Street man. How he had laughed, just as thousands would find only laughter for him; even when his whole world had tumbled down and crushed him. There was no man under the *débris*: only a tortured soul; a soul that had craved life and was dying unborn. He could not speak.

Jarvis was sorry. He was sensitive: he felt, although no one could quite understand, how terrible was this man's loss; realized that Rubblejay's real life had begun that night in

Santayana's and that he had lived, since, in gorgeous purple tents of wine, woman, and song. And now the tents were burned and he had no place of refuge. The purposelessness of his life had been manifest before: to return to such inertia was impossible now. Having been moved to understand dimly other things, torpitude was now unbearable, unbelievable. And there was only that. These things, somehow, Jarvis knew. He sought to make it easier by showing Rubblejay that when he chose great wealth out of all life has to offer, he could expect to gain nothing else; the price others paid to gratify his ambition had been too great. Jarvis threw up the blinds.

"Look at those starving men down there," he said. "There are thousands like them, maybe millions, because you and your kind have your own share of money and theirs, too. That is our fear; the fear of all poor people—to be like them. That is what we face from birth, people like Letty and me.

"How can you expect us to have any friendship for you unreasonably rich men who take our shares and threaten us with *that*? Friends? Impossible: enemies always. You fight us down on the Street, in Capel Court, in the Bourse. When we get the chance: when you come into our world; we are just as unscrupulous in fighting you. You *are* unscrupulous; otherwise you wouldn't dare have unnecessary millions while those poor devils starve down there.

"So we don't want your friendship; we won't accept it. We only want your money:—our money and their money." He pointed again. "You pay the penalty, Rubblejay. You can't *buy* anything worth while. You've got to *be* it. I'm sorry you've found that out too late.

"And because I'm sorry, I'm a fool. There are your letters. Good-night."

He flicked across the ribbon-tied bundle; but Rubblejay let it fall unheeded. He still stared. He had not seen the



"That is going to cost you just one hundred thousand dollars," he said coldly.

men on the Embankment: he refused the reason; he only insisted on the result. He could not understand, even, that, in the moment he had ceased to be a millionaire and had been pitifully human, relying on neither wealth now power, Jarvis had been helpless against him. But Rubblejay ignored the lesson, only saw that he was punished; so Jarvis strode across the room, stuffed the letters into the other's pocket, and, almost, pushed him to the door; lest cupidity again stir in his own breast. When he had turned the lock, he breathed deep relief: the reason for which he was unable to explain. It was too emotional a moment for introspection.

Indeed, it was years before the scene re-created itself and the reason for that sight of relief stood clear. Years?—to be exact, seven, and he stood with Letty in Covent Garden Market, breathing in at sunrise the scent of a thousand spring-flowers, a scent borne to them on the dewy breeze of dawn. They had remained awake for the morning-papers; these, fresh and damp, Letty now crushed in her arms. Each and every one had said that the Jarvis play produced "last night" was the playwright in apogee: that, in it, he was no longer merely a great American but an universal.

Letty's work in a principal rôle also had been accorded respectful consideration. "It has been said of Miss Lee that she began as a chorus-girl. If that fact had anything to do with her present interpretative powers, we strongly urge chorus experience as a school for our future actresses. . . ."

"Oh, Burt!!" she murmured. He awoke, suddenly, from reverie:

"And if we'd taken that money from Rubblejay, we might be wasters, to-day," he said, taking her hand. "Might have started on a vacation that wouldn't have ended until the money did;—and then been out of the habit of work. As it is . . . Poor old Rubblejay: I wonder how long it took him to get over it?"

VII

It is hard to answer the playwright's question. It is work for the expert psychologist rather than the historian to determine whether, by the time Rubblejay forgot Letty, he was too deep in excesses to go back; or whether he so continued to banish an ever recurring memory. Then, again, the misfortunes that grew out of Letty's affair also must have played a part he desired to forget; for he had been so mad with disappointment that he mislaid the bundle of letters Jarvis gave him and, somehow, by servants' treachery or sheer luck, they fell into his wife's hands. Whereupon she had forced a divorce and the payment of her dower-right, one-third of his entire fortune; showing by her conduct through the trial, that, whatever her sentiments at marriage, he had alienated her affections long since, and that she, too, had endured him only because she must.

He had taken great pleasure in his home; but, now, the suspicion that every one tried to rob him was increased tenfold, and when he must handle the household accounts, such was the irritation superinduced by the petty pilfering of servants that he had sold his house three months after divorce and gone to his club. So there was denied him even that comforting complacency that comes to small souls from ruling a large staff of menials. Therefore, the dream of a home persisted and tortured him; since, without a wife, it could not be realized. He might have married any number of times; some women, in sheer vacancy, might have admired him; but all in whom this was possible were poor and, in each, he saw a Letty, and, speaking, through her, a Jarvis; and he was too old for silly rich women, too inane for wise ones. As for male companionship, that was unchanged: all his life

he had worked, so did not know how to play; hence was avoided as a "duffer" by the younger generation; while the quiet pleasures of old gentlemen only irritated him.

In sheer desperation, he went back to business again. But, this time, *he* was the speculator. A new combination ruled Wall Street and were The Fates. With decreased interests, he was of too small an importance to be given a seat on the steps of the Throne; although several times he was misled into thinking he was "on the inside"; just as, a few years back, he had misled others. Shorn, he left the street; a poor man as he, to whom money was life, counted wealth. So the dread fear beset him that he was no longer important; only by drinking heavily could the fear be dissipated; otherwise it persisted and with it came the conviction that he was an ignorant old man whom anybody could trick, anyone delude; for whom no one cared a jot.

Drunken, in bars and clubs of no high caliber; so long as he paid for the drinks of his listeners, he could live over again the days when he was a Wall Street "power." Staggering off to bed, he was royal in the tribute of overtipped commissionaires, and cabmen. And his drinking increased in proportion to his loneliness; until, at the time Letty and Burt stood successful in Covent Garden, his relatives, alarmed at the continual shrinking of their inheritance, had him carted off, one gray morning, to a sanitarium; where, denied the power to deceive himself, he died.

I wonder if, somewhere there is not lurking the microbe which, some day, will alight upon Letty Lee? For is not the cycle interminable? Is it not the only perpetual motion which this earth has yet achieved;—this war that wages forever; for which no one knows the cause, yet to end which is to end All-Life?

I wonder.

II. FROM THE MEMOIRS OF A PROMINENT CITIZEN

I

THEY hanged poor Brownie the other day. Out in one of those semi-barbarous Southwestern States, they "hanged him by the neck until he was dead." And here I am, prosperous, respected, even honored, and a representative "of the people" (as "the peepul" love to believe) in Congress. But if Kincaid had met him instead of me that night before Brownie and I were about to commit our biggest offense against the law, might not Buck Tremmersett have danced on nothing down there in the Southwestern desert and the Honorable Arthur Paget Browne deliberated gravely on lower tariffs and bigger navies? I am no hypocrite in private, no matter what my career compels me to be in public, and what little there was to choose between Brownie and myself was all on his side, not mine. Poor old Brownie! I suppose he had to pay for scores of ancestors who lolled on plantation porticoes while hundreds of slaves sweated to bring in money to be danced and diced away. There must be some good reason why *he* had to suffer and I did not, and my people can show a clean bill of health: they worked too hard and got too little pay to have the time, strength or money to show anything else. So it was about time for a Tremmersett to come in for the good things of the earth; whereas the Paget-Brownes had them for a hundred years or more, until, with Browne's grandfather, the family fortunes started to landslide.

You know those F. F. V.'s of nowadays, don't you?—most of them not to be distinguished with the naked eye from plain ordinary citizens. It's only when the Hunt Balls come off, and you see dancing with the *débutantes* the fellow who served your ice cream soda, or who sold you your socks, or who traded in new-laid eggs for a ham, that you realize, without any awe, that you have a speaking acquaintance with those famous first families of song and story. And should you ask one of them who resides in the red-brick Tudor mansion that dominates the town from the heights nearby, the handsomest house roundabout, you are apt to hear that "nobody" resides there. At least nobody *much*: only those Ketchams who have the brewery that employs half the population of the town. But old man Ketcham kept a saloon and, although even he would not have insulted his white patrons by allowing negroes at the bar, it was an open scandal that, if they handed in buckets at the side door, they would not be returned empty.

Whereas, did you inadvertently refer to an unshaven, unsightly creature, seeking of rum, as "that old drunk," the one who had so scornfully put in their negligible place the upstart Ketchams would grow stern of mien and request that you refer more respectfully to "one of the Randolphs—the Randolphs, sir." And "Brownie" was one of the Brownes—"the *Paget-Brownes*, sir."

I first saw Brownie—I was far too unimportant a person to meet him socially those days—at a county horse show, which I had been sent to report for a Richmond paper. "Brownie" rode his dappled mare in the steeplechase that followed, made a good showing, and, with other contestants of good families, drank wassail at the Warrenton House. At the ball that night, two-score negroes, servants of Brownie and his friends, stood outside under the chestnut trees, in charge of the horses and rigs, and, even more im-

portant, of divers flasks. Between dances, their masters left the ballroom and, each calling for his "boy," the flasks were requisitioned until they were empty; as a result, much irresolution in walk and talk, much colliding of dancing couples, much stumbling, one or two falls, a deal of boisterous laughter. The women did not seem to take it very seriously: it was the privilege of Paget-Brownes or Randolphs, it seemed.

I often wondered why Browne ever left a town where, by virtue of his ancestry and despite his own lack of enterprise and position, he held so high a place. "No door was shut to him," as their saying is; he attended the most exclusive affairs, was greeted respectfully by "white trash" and negroes, was tended solicitously when drunk and carried home tenderly. He might have entered politics, and his popularity would have carried him almost as far as my brains and work have since carried me. He might have married one of many girls of his own class, many of whom had more money than he. Between the interest on such a wife's money and that which could be gained from the remaining acres of the original Paget-Browne patent, Brownie's income would have been ample for all the necessities and for some luxuries. And all this without any labor to speak of, for most of the farming down there was done by "white trash" and negroes on the sharing principle. Or he might have married among the newly-rich anxious for a position in county society: one of the Ketcham girls was "crazy about him" (as she would have said), and there were others besides the Ketchams. But I suppose the monotony of the social system bored him. So, when he inherited his acres, he sold them and came to New York.

II

I DID not know him in his early New York days. I gather from his subsequent conversation that he had confidence in his knowledge of horseflesh. The tracks were in their heyday then: Morris Park, Gravesend and Sheepshead; and nearby, Saratoga, Pimlico, Bennings. In the intervals between "meets" he attended prizefights and took financial interests therein, and called by their nicknames wheel-men, faro-dealers and the proprietors of poker-parlors—privileges for which one must pay highly.

Often I have wondered at the imaginations that can conceive of profitable gambling for outsiders. In Monte Carlo one sees a block of marble palaces built from proprietary profits, most expensive paintings and statuary within, a horde of well-dressed employees; knows that after the Prince of Monaco has received millions a year for his rental, and the entire taxes of the country have also been paid, the profits are still enormous. At Ascot or Epsom, in Tattersall's private enclosure, one sees the same prosperous, paunched book-makers year after year, and in London at "the Roman's" their wives or sweethearts blazing with jewelry. On Broadway, at Curate's or Sydenham's the wives or sweethearts of New York gambling-house proprietors, arrayed like Solomon's lilies, may be observed drinking the costliest wines. . . . And these are honest proprietors; yet the outsider must also take his chances against more than occasional "brace" games: electrically connected "wheels," "high layouts," "strippers" and factory-marked cards, "signaling," "cold decks" and many and various private dexterities of professional card-men. In the face of all this, gambling by outsiders seems nothing less than a disease.

I imagine Brownie, unawares, encountered all the brace

games. Though he had many splendid strokes of racetrack luck, he was penniless in less than two years. When I next saw him, it was at the Belvedere, where we both lived, a cheap lodging-house, called a hotel because it had a lobby and a clerk at the desk: one of those innumerable side-street Tenderloin places from which the poor go forth to prey on the rich. Here, for want of funds, we sat in the lobby; for want of something to do, we formulated all sorts of petty larceny schemes. Somehow, we managed to keep alive: in my case, chiefly because of my idea about the duplicate lunch-room checks.

It was this that brought Brownie and me together. Up to then I had not remarked him save as the one of us sunk in the deepest gloom, for the racing season was over. While the tracks had been open, even if he failed to net anything by the sale of his tips, always there was some lucky winner who knew him when he had been a "gentleman," and would "stake" him to a "finnif," as he would have expressed it then. Talk about "blood tells"!—here was the descendant of all the Paget-Brownes, accepting charity from ex-stable boys, jockeys, coarse, ungrammatical racetrack followers. And his speech was composed entirely of what such people call "wise cracks"—the patter of the underworld. So much so that he was afterward dubbed "The Wise Cracking Kid."

"We see a lot of that sort," an experienced lawbreaker told me afterward, one day in London, when the conversation happened to drift to old days at the Belvedere. He was a courtly-mannered old gentleman with silvered hair, a monocle and a precise, melodious speech. "I don't just know the reason for the germ. I suppose the explanation lies along the same psychological lines as that of the kids who play at Robin Hood and Dick Turpin—and later in life tell girls how wicked they are: drunk every night—wild fellows. It's effective with some girls, too. . . . Anyhow, the underworld

is full of boys who never stole a dollar: who haven't the nerve. They sponge on people who have, run their errands—*lobbygows*. Some even get money from home. What they love best is to find people a little more ignorant or inexperienced than themselves—girls especially—and tell them how they broke into banks and held up trains or did some desperate deed somewhere. . . . I knew one once who would buy a billfold, dirty it up a bit, put a few dollars into it and come rushing into a hangout, telling us how he 'nicked a boob for this poke on a crosstown short with a big harness bull right at my mitt!' He never used ordinary English if there was a 'wise crack' equivalent; and he pulled that billfold stunt half a dozen times until we began to wonder why they were all alike, outside and in—"

III

BROWNIE wasn't that bad, of course; but I know he was guiltless of any illegal offense before we met. But, to hear him, although he was never specific about time or place or the character of his crimes, you might have imagined he was Black Bart; and, though I have known many thieves, never one has spoken so fluently the *argot* of the underworld. For this he commanded the admiration of most of the Belvedere residents: a stupid lot, generally. I suppose none of them had ever dared lay hands on anything of greater value than the *petit* larceny law covered. Mostly, they had drifted into the lower world through sheer inability to secure high enough wages to be other than half starved; and they welcomed Browne's tales as the realization of their own ambitions. As for Brownie, having been shamefully despoiled of his inheritance by sharper men, I suppose it was some innate power of self-deception that he used to preserve his self-respect. He

was loudest in his derision of "easy marks," perhaps for fear these Belvedere folk would discover he had been one.

Personally, the calling of crook never appealed to me. Always I have believed that, in this world of fools, a man is deficient who cannot keep within legal limits and flourish. I *had* flourished in my native town, had been a city editor at nineteen; but two years of it convinced my immature brain that the town was too small for my large talents—this very town which I now represent in Congress, pitiful little ass that I was! It is a common fever, and it crowds New York: the small town is the place for big returns nowadays; in New York most people are squelched by subordination if they find jobs, or fall into crooked ways if they don't. I had been unable to secure anything that offered even a living wage—according to my ideas of living—and while remaining unattached that I might be ready when something worthy of me should turn up—as I imagined importantly it was bound to do—I came down to my last five dollars.

It was then that I conceived the plans of the duplicate lunch-room checks, and turned to view the lobby loungers for the best partner—it needed another man. Brownie was nearest, and I beckoned him out for a walk, during which I outlined my plan to get food and drink for nothing—almost. Brownie was enthusiastic. Since the tracks had closed down he had not eaten with any degree of regularity.

My system was simple, and may still be utilized by any two hungry ones. I give it here for their benefit. In the cheaper restaurants or lunch-room the waitress punches on a check the amount of one's meal—which is payable to the sharp-eyed cashier at the only exit. I entered one of these restaurants, and passing far to the rear ordered a glass of milk which I drank so slowly and over which I dawdled so long that it was ten minutes before I called for my check. The waitress insisted that she had given it to me at the

moment of serving: I was equally insistent in the negative, although to please her I searched every pocket, looked under the table and elsewhere. Finally she accompanied me to the cashier, explaining that the check was lacking; and I was allowed to ransom myself without it. After a similar experience in a place just over the way, Brownie joined me around the corner, and we exchanged checks and restaurants. Passing into this, I took another retired position; and ordered a hungry man's meal, denying myself nothing; the check for which I buried deep in an inside pocket. Then, waiting until a number of people should be in line at the cashier's cage, I joined them, paid Brownie's check for his single cup of coffee and joined him again, this time bright of eye and of speech, the recipient of a meal whose like had not cheered him in a decennium—or so it had seemed to him; and this plan of procuring our daily bread we continued as far north as Fifty-eighth Street and as far south as Madison Square for the better part of two weeks; when the threat of the clerk at the Belvedere made me turn to the consideration of schemes that would produce room-rent. Resulted the idea of the Bibles: as simple basically and structurally as the other.

It came from glancing idly and aimlessly through a newspaper, the favorite of middle-class respectability, a copy of which had been abandoned in an "L" train on which I was returning from my 'steen-hundredth rejection by Park Row. When one wishes to avoid intimate and unpleasant reflections, any sort of reading matter serves; and, as there was about to be confided to me the bitter conviction that I was an incompetent ass, I pretended interest even in advertising, diverting my contempt to those fools for whom certain palpable swindles were set forth at great expense. "What sort of people *invest* in such things?" I asked myself, and was answered by the obituary column where, in agate type, at no inconsiderable number of pennies per line, was inserted atro-

cious doggerel "In Memoriam." One particularly—I, an intelligent man, without funds and money wasted on such ghastly, grisly nonsense—shook me with silent scorn:

My Dear Husband's gone to Heaven,
On an Angel's Wing,
Up There on the Streets so Golden,
Praises he will sing.

BY HIS LOVING WIFE.

. . . "Mrs. Jerry K. Winch"—the address a Harlem one. As I mused over her superlative idiocy, the personal side of it occurred to me. The money of such folk must be easy to get; why shouldn't *I* have some of it? In another minute I saw a way. So I left the train at Astor Place instead of Herald Square. At the office of the American Bible Society I bought two very respectable imitations of leather-bound Bibles. Around the corner, where the clerk directed me, I ordered gold stamping for each, Gutenberg type, Gothic, impressive but inexpensive: "Jerry K. Winch" for one, "Ephraim Cowley" for the other! Ephraim had been in the same column. But after I had sent Brownie for them later in the day, he showed his usual lack of constructive imagination, and I was forced to explain.

"We call, asking for Mr. Winch. After sad news, surprise—sympathy—condolences—'We won't intrude business at such a time'—prepare to go. 'Any friend of my own dear husband's'—we yield to her persuasions: unwrap Bible—there's his name in bright gold letters—his last message. 'A few weeks ago Mr. Winch ordered a Bible from us. . . .' The rest is pure logic. If she loved him enough to break into print at fifty cents a line, what will she do when she thinks poor dear Jerry was so thoughtful of his soul that he ordered another Bible? It makes his salvation sure. She'll gladly pay four dollars for that. The cost, including stamping and car-

fare, is a dollar and thirty-five cents. Figure three or four a day. Gives me plenty of time to keep hunting my job and you to dope out those 'past performance' tables."

"It seems a dirty trick," said that ridiculous Brownie. "However—" he hastened to add.

He resurrected his frockcoat from the pawnshop after I had made the Winch sale, and wore with it a white lawn tie—as I did; and, with our none too recent top hats, we looked like earnest young divinity students. We made only one slip—where the husband had been bedridden for nearly a year before his death; but even then I convinced his widow he had ordered through a friend. Such people, as their poetic efforts show, will stand for anything. I cannot see, to this day, what harm we did. We made them happy with the thought that the minds of the departed ones had been on spiritual things. And we encouraged Biblical study. However, that young sentimentalist, Brownie, had to spoil it all.

It was after a month of profitable sales that I found him seated, half drunk, in the hotel bar, gloomy and depressed. He wept into his whiskey when he told me why; and I, too, became sufficiently sentimental after several drinks to share his melancholy and self-hate and to swear off peddling Bibles.

Mrs. Michael Hartigan had done it. She drew ten dollars a week in a department store and paid out three to a woman who minded her baby. The husband had died an atheist. Not the least of her sorrows had been the thought that a particularly hot spike in hell had been dusted off on his arrival. The ordering of the Bible proved, instead, that he was wearing the glorified nightgown uniform of a member of the Heavenly Host. She had fainted for joy, clutching Michael's passport to the better world; and when the contrite Brownie had revived her, she begged him to let her keep it on the instalment plan: she had only a dollar in cash. Brownie who had taken the Bible from her while she was unconscious,

now slipped in ten dollars between the pages, and, incoherent, departed.

"What a filthy business!" he said fiercely. "I'm done. I'm through. I'd rather starve." Somehow, he managed to convince me that I would, too. I'm the most moral man in the world when I have a few dollars in the bank.

IV

It was soon after this that we met Gracie Graham. Brownie fell in love with her and she with me. Brownie was too tame for her: he would fetch and carry and pay her compliments, just like the men on whom she preyed. But I gave her to understand on several occasions that, when I associated with a semi-educated young woman of no great mental endowments, I condescended. True, she was pretty enough; and like all New York women who have the price, she wore smart clothes; and, for the reason that New York contains more ignorant men with money than any city in the world, she could pick and choose among half a dozen daily as to which was to have the honor of paying for her dinner and taxicabs: with a sad story at the end of it when the man asked her to see him the next night: a story about the horrid old man who had promised her a cheque if she would dine with him then; and, much as she hated it, if she didn't she would lose all the money she had paid on her diamond ring and the instalment house would take the ring back. That was one story: she had half a dozen just as effective. When the rescuer wanted *his* payment, she was out. New York is full of Gracie Grahams.

Of course, she didn't try any such tricks on us, for, although our new hotel was better than the Belvedere, it was not the sort that sheltered wealth. Besides, all human beings

love *confidentes*. You lose half the pleasure of making one person look foolish if you cannot tell another one; who, living the same sort of life as yours, cannot condemn and will likely applaud. As Anson Eagle, who lived as we did in those days, wrote in his "Ballads of Broadway":

For a life like this, it lonely is,
With never a steady pal,
To be at the joint when you come to tell
How you grabbed a live one and how he fell
For the "old thing" game or the upturned shell:
So the boy he got him a gal.

Brownie, true to his belief of the way to win a woman, had told Gracie all sorts of fantastic lies about our exploits as *chevaliers d'industrie* and our narrow escapes from the hands of the law; which I was forced to confirm when called upon. Brownie had confided his love to me the first day we met Gracie, and I would not be a stumbling-block. In return, when I was present, Gracie told some lies of her own: founded on truth, doubtless, but three-quarters fiction *in toto*; and Brownie set himself the task of advising her to greater profit. He was always talking about "not going color-blind looking at silver—get the big money"; and all the while the savings from our Bible scheme were running low; and they ran lower when Gracie borrowed most of Brownie's and he had to borrow from me.

"Well," he protested sulkily when I chided him—"well, you know how things are in the summer. None of the good men are in town, and the few that are she don't meet because she isn't working." Gracie had always had a roof-garden engagement previous summers. "But there's a man coming from Chicago next week, worth barrels and crazy about her. Don't bother about anything you loan *her*—"

We heard much of this man subsequently from Gracie,

He had written her several times most respectfully: and, from his orthography and calligraphy, seemed the sort to be sentimental and liberal; but he continued to delay his arrival until, when finally he did come, my savings had vanished. So, between us and eviction, we had only what Gracie owed Brownie, and we were back at our lunch-room tricks for meals.

Judge our horror then when, on the night that the Chicago man came, Gracie ran swiftly into our room without knocking, telling us in guarded whispers that our Chicago rescue party was in her sitting-room; that he was vilely intoxicated; that he had insulted her grossly, and that she had been compelled to flee to us for protection!

Brownie started up, swearing; but she pulled him back. "And just think," she wailed: "he must have thousands in his pocket—a bit fat roll *so* thick. . . . He showed it to me. If I could only have snatched it and run!" Her eyes sought mine. "The beast! Can't somebody *do* something to him? Is he to have all that and we starve?" Still her eyes inquired of mine, mutely. "If we only knew someone who'd just knock him down and *take* it!"

"Why!" said Brownie valiantly. "Why—" But she looked at me. I think she realized that Brownie would make excuses: would explain how, if it wasn't for fear of having her *name* involved—if it wasn't that everybody knew we were her intimates—if it wasn't for—any number of good reasons, he, Arthur Paget-Browne, would—do any number of desperate things. Women reason better than men realize; but, because they reason with their subconscious brain and are unable to give categories and syllogisms with their results, men refer to their "intuition" as though it were a form of hysteria.

It was then I realized Brownie hadn't a show if I cared to go after this girl; and such is the natural egotism of men that my sole purpose at the moment was to prove her con-

fidence in me was deserved. I had a flash of futurities, allied with her. I had been on the wrong track: my talents, doubtless, lay along the lines of larceny; for the first time, I recall the lunch-room and Bible grafts with some pride. This girl had divined those talents. Together we would go down in the history of law-breaking as the most remarkable of all criminal couples. And the prospect actually stirred me and set my heart to beating high.

But my head was clear: I saw her little game. "Go on back to him now," I said coolly. "Even if he is blind drunk, he may suspect. You needn't have told that yarn about his insults and his attacks. We all need the money too badly to need excuses for our consciences—" She interrupted me with an indignant exclamation, and with what a certain type of writer calls "flashing eyes." "Now, now," I urged, smiling, "remember you're among friends and you can tell your real name. You saw the roll, saw he was drunk and wondered how you could get it. Then you thought if you could stir us up with a tale of bitter wrong, we would think it was morally right to take it. Well, maybe it is; maybe *he* stole it. Maybe it's wrong; maybe he didn't. But we'll grab it anyhow. . . . So you get back to him. When you send him away tell him not to take a cab,—say some nighthawk is apt to drive him to some lonely place and brain him. He mustn't take a cab. That would be the blow-off."

"But I thought—" she began.

"You thought we could do it *here*?" I asked scornfully. "We couldn't spend enough to-night to pay for seven years up the river. Run along now."

If Brownie had not been there, she would have thrown her arms around me. As it was, she used her eyes.

"Be careful," she said—"oh, do be careful. I'd never forgive myself. . . ." Poor Brownie was too occupied with dismal forebodings to notice that none of her solicitude was

for him. Outside the hotel, he "wondered if it was wise" and was informed that his services were not necessary. "Go back and tell her *I'll* bring the roll," I jeered. That decided him. Although, even then, he did none of the actual work. It was I who struck the fellow down.

It was no great feat of either power or cunning. To reach Broadway, he must pass through a sort of Valley of the Shadows—a row of gambling-houses, their fronts shuttered, silent and unlighted: between any two pairs of high brown-stone steps broad patches of sheer dusky gloom. As he passed, Brownie, lounging as directed, asked him for a match, moving into the shadow patch as he did so; for otherwise possible sharp eyes at either end of the block might see the fall. This way it appeared to any such that he had stepped in toward a gratinged basement entrance, and had been admitted to a gambling-house—a very credible thing for a drunken man to do.

The high steps on either side hid any further operations, and when he had fallen under a well-directed blow from my heavy-knitted cocobolo walking-stick, we had only passers-by, or persons emerging from the basement to fear while we—or rather I—poor shivering Brownie would not touch him—collected the spoils.

I felt his heart—I'll say that much for myself; and I left his watch, stickpin, cigarette-case and all other articles of value except the roll. People came and went every little while from the gambling-house, and he would soon be discovered and sent on his way—so I assured Brownie, but he needed four strong slugs of whiskey before he could believe this, or anything else. It was not until after we had counted the money and found it was considerably more than two thousand that Brownie began to feel that what we had done was right. And, when we returned to Gracie, he felt that it had been not only right but noble. To hear him tell it was like reading

a newspaper account: all wrong but very romantic. He added details of his own mental processes the existence of which had not been revealed at the time by his pale, scared face. It appeared he had not been scared at all: he was too busy plotting craftily and bloodthirstily what he would do should passers-by or police intervene; and he had been crouched like a panther waiting to deal a decisive blow should mine prove ineffective. As I listened to him, it seemed the efficiency of my action was merely accidental: Brownie had conceded me the initiative out of pure unselfishness.

Nevertheless, his enthusiasm for our new profession, now that the plunge was over, infected me; and Gracie's ardent gaze helped me to a like enthusiasm. Abandoned were all ambitions to become a Greeley, a Dana or a Brisbane. I spoke contemptuously of all dull plodding drones willing to accept honest drudgery. Eight hundred apiece for the work of a few moments!

Within the next few days, after waiting for our victim to recover and return to Chicago—a journey on Gracie's part would have been a confession of guilt before that—we three sailed for Southampton; Gracie and I as Mr. and Mrs. James Buchanan Stone; Brownie trailing along, partly consoled for his disappointment of the heart by smart new clothes and roseate promises the future held forth.

V

I DO not remember seeing in print at any time anything that adequately describes the life for which we had now definitely declared ourselves. Either one reads of low, besotted criminals such as were first made familiar to the public by Hogarth and by "Oliver Twist," or else they are romantic fellows who never lived outside fiction: descendants of Har-

ri-son Ainsworth's heroes, "Lupins," "Raffleses," "Wallingfords"—whose authors know of the underworld only by hearsay. The real people have no distinguishing characteristics, save that, as a rule, their profession demands they be better groomed than the average citizen and spend money more freely. They are to be found in every first-class café, and in half of the clubs, of any cosmopolitan city. Many have titles—some real, some not; most are excellently educated and entertaining of discourse; a goodish half are ex-professional men. Waiters—even head-waiters—welcome them: they tip better than most and are on speaking terms with a large proportion of the aristocracy of spenders. They are assisted by many friends and familiars who share their spoils—actors, actresses and theatrical managers, many of whom have graduated from their ranks; criminal lawyers, *demi-mondaines* and men-about-town. Their little world is most exclusive, close-knit by general suspicion of outsiders, hence a world difficult to enter unless one is already implicated in some offense against the law. Although its members are everywhere: one may be your bridge partner at a house party of the newly rich, your dancing partner at an upper-class Bohemian gathering, may be seen nightly at your favorite restaurant, give a box party at the opening night of a new play. . . .

We were first welcomed into this world on board our Atlantic grayhound. It is astonishing how many desirable acquaintances one can make when a good-looking girl is of your party. And if her male escorts dress for dinner and carry their dress clothes as though they were accustomed to their nightly use, even the suspicious are at your heels.

So I found, and so did Brownie. In the smoking-room and lounge, superior-looking men were at some trouble to make our acquaintance, continuing in our company, by hook or crook, until Gracie loomed up; practically forcing intro-

ductions. And I never made it easy for them, on the principle that not until you hang out the S. R. O. sign can you persuade people to be eager to enter your theater. Thus we came to know a newly created Canadian peer, the son of a Middle West petroleum king, a vapid New Yorker or two, members of the best clubs—some half a dozen more, rich and inane. So devoted were they that if she wished to be alone Gracie had to keep to her cabin.

On the fourth day I got my passport into Subterranea. A man with a small mustache and a pleasant smile lay in wait for Gracie outside our stateroom, and asked me to excuse him for a moment while he spoke to my "wife." "I'm a friend of Evelyn Van Buren," he told her. A few minutes later she brought him into the stateroom. Both were smiling. "He thought maybe you were a—an outsider, Buck," she said. "This"—she lowered her voice—"is Bob Stanley, but he's on the passenger list as H. St. John Edgar. He'll split it fifty fifty if I introduce him to Lord Hagworth and Mr. Todd"—the peer and the petroleum heir—"and I was telling him some of the others were worth while, too."

"All Gracie has to do is organize a bridge party," said Bob Stanley. "To-morrow after luncheon is best. I can meet them to-night. I'll drift up to the lounge while you're taking coffee. You play, Buck?" So was I admitted: there are no "Misters" and "Misses" in Subterranea. . . . We reached London a hundred and fifty pounds richer.

But that was only the beginning. Brownie and I were initiated into the mysteries of "strippers" and "signals," Gracie acting always as the decoy: some cleverer card-manipulator always willing to help us scientifically to pluck our pigeon. Working without her, we learned how to operate "the match," "the lemon" and various other simple but profitable games. We "declared in" other friends and were rewarded by reciprocity. Other games, too, matters of person-

ality and persuasiveness rather than technicality. Altogether, for more than six months, we frequented the most expensive restaurants of London, Paris and Monte Carlo; were frequenters of Epsom, Ascot, Auteuil and other racetracks: in fact, were always to be found when wealth and fashion gathered publicly and always seemed the peers of the wealthiest and the most fashionable. Not once did we have even a warning from the police.

But, with the Leopold Wyndham affair, the blow fell. However, I was not there to meet it: I was on my way back to America. It had not taken long for the novelty of the life to wear off; and now, far from seeing myself the master of my pigeons, I saw I was really quite as much their servants as any hired women. I could not consult my own personal tastes at all. My day began with five o'clock tea, and ended, in London, when they turned the last people out of the Cosmo supper club; in Paris, with breakfast at the Pré Catelan, the early morning sun shining on my rumpled dress clothes. I must conceal all my real emotions, pretend to be amused by the conversation of bores if they had money, uproariously insist on buying wine for rich drunkards, as though buying wine was my favorite indoor sport, laugh heartily at degenerate stories that should have been warrant enough for knocking their narrators down. Say what you will against the sons of Subterranea, at least they live the life as a profession, and are vastly superior to those who live it for pleasure. Pleasure—God save the mark. What worthless sewer-minded beasts those rich pleasure seekers are: a hundred times more criminal than we, were the world ruled by justice instead of by law.

Never once did I feel any compunctions at taking their money—never one single time. When I think how many people had to live like dogs that these worms could spend fortunes on indecency, I really believe I was doing a worthy

thing. Worms, graveyard worms, fat and sluggy and noisome, that's what they were. To be forced to endure their companionship was worth incalculable sums: it was they who drove me back to honesty, not my fellow adventurers.

It was just about the time that the worms' companionship had begun to get intolerable that I met old Tom Kincaid, mayor of my home town for over a decade, and Miss Mary, at Hyères, where I had gone with Brownie for a few days' vacation, that stretched into a week after meeting them. They were from my home town; I had been a reporter on old Tom's paper. It does one good to meet rich men like him: the thought of taking his money occurred to us no more than would heaving a brick through a cathedral window. There was no touch of the sanctimonious moralist about him: yet he had done more to make my birthplace clean than ten thousand vice-crusaders; for, both as mayor and newspaper editor, he admitted the fundamental instincts of men and urged that it was better they should be safeguarded only against excess than to deny them everything and have unrestricted secret horrors. He had some new plans for civic legislation, had come abroad to study their working in France and Germany, and was all aglow with the realization of their practicality; talking gleefully of how he would carry them through alike in the teeth of ignorant prudes and political grafters.

"The crux of the difficulty in America, suh," he said sadly, "is that grafters don't want vice restricted and made to pay taxes to relieve the po'ah people. They want the taxes paid to *them*. And they work up hysterical refo'mahs to make ridiculous laws of suppression. The refo'mahs are the cats that pull the chestnuts out of the fi'ah, suh. I have to fight them bo'ath."

Disguising my inside knowledge of vice by calling myself a criminologist, I gave him much helpful and illuminating advice. He was manifestly sorry to see me go; but Gracie's

insistent telegrams from Paris were not to be overlooked any longer: she might join us. On the train back, Brownie was also melancholy and depressed but for a different reason.

"What a girl!" he said. He had been allowed to escort Miss Mary about while her father and I talked sociology and reform. "It makes a man realize how low he is to meet a girl like that. Why, I'm not fit to touch the hem of her skirt!" (Oh, yes! Brownie was one of those sentimentalists who talked that way.) "I'm not fit to be on the same street with her. My God, Buck," he burst out, tears in his eyes, "why couldn't I have married a girl like that in Warrenton? But it's too late now, too late—"

"Why?" I reasoned, sensibly. "You have never been arrested, much less convicted. You have some money—enough to last you a year if you're careful. Why don't you go back on the same boat with them—settle in Richmond? Why, with your name—in Virginia! Old Tom'll find some way to make you useful and help support your wife." Unconsciously, save for the wife part of it, I was outlining my own desires; convincing myself of their feasibility; and it annoyed me for Brownie to shake his head and say it was too late: too many people knew: he was bound to be recognized some day and that meant disgrace for her, too—it wasn't fair. . . . Which shows, from the accepted standpoint of morality—the sentimental one—how superior Brownie was to me; as you will see.

Gracie had called us back to Paris for a grand *coup*: one whose success would enable us to quit the life we were leading and give each one of us a small income for life—to live as we liked. I had planned it all before we left for Hyères, and she was to play her game with the man while we were away. She had done so; but, because of our delay, we must follow him to London to finish it off; and here again I was to blame for what followed: for the laws of England are

much severer against this particular sort of blackmail than are the laws of France; where hypocritical respectability does not get a deal of sympathy. And Leopold Wyndam, a South African Jew who had been shrewd enough to make a fortune by trickery on the Rand, had suspected before he fled and was prepared for us; although this I did not know when, the night before the trick was to be turned, I met again, quite by accident, old Tom Kincaid and Miss Mary.

I was dining alone at the Carlton because of a bitter quarrel with Gracie, when old Tom came in. He was taking the boat train to Liverpool immediately after dinner, and, to my utter amazement, he blurted out his astonishing proposal a minute after I joined them for coffee. "I've had my hands full as it is, boy," he said; "they'll be full'ah now, with this fight on, and I'm not so strong as I used to be. I doze at my desk nights when I should be getting out the pa'peh. You've grown some, I reckon, since you were my reportah. You have i-deahs I want my succesah to have. I reckon I've got to die *some* time—"

"Oh, father!" interrupted Miss Mary, with sudden tears. "And so," he went on cheerfully, "since you know the town and it knows you and you have those big i-deahs, I want you to help me be a bettah mayah by taking the *Argus* off my hands. Editing it," he added explanatorily; then wistfully: "I tried to get in touch with you in Paris and then here: my agent's still hunting you. I wanted you to take the trip back with us, so by the time you landed you'd be ready to begin. But, of course, now—"

I thought of the bitter quarrel with Gracie—her infernal causeless jealousy again; thought of the Wyndam case next day and the possibility of failure which meant night after night of boredom among drunkards and fools again, with always the possibility of a slip and the legal penalty.

"An hour yet to catch the boat train?" I asked. "Pshaw,

Mr. Mayor, I'll pack a few things and meet you at the station."

VI

PEOPLE with good memories for what they read in newspapers will remember the celebrated Wyndam blackmail. Brownie got three years for it. Gracie was acquitted because Brownie, who without realizing the consequences must have enjoyed playing the desperado before all London, took the entire blame.

My disappearance, the fact that I never returned to the hotel after my quarrel with Gracie (I bought some ready-made things for traveling instead) no doubt inclined both of them to the view of suicide, especially as I had been gloomy ever since Hyères: on all of which I had counted. So, if only for sentimental reasons, my name was not mentioned. Yet it was all my idea, my details—all mine. Poor Brownie, who paid the penalty, had done no more than in the case of the Bibles or the man from Chicago.

. . . I can realize what happened after his three years' "stretch." He was the sort environment shapes. He could not seek out his old haunts and hold up his head an equal again: he was just a Dartmoor convict, one of many. Drinking, then, to forget, and, when hungry, clumsy crimes, the assistant of such bungling lower-class crooks as he had come to know in prison. . . . It was just such an affair down there in the Southwest: yeggmen, a village post-office safe, and a chance shot that reached a pursuer. The others had been more fleet of foot than poor drunken Brownie.

This "justice"! A child psychologist could have told that politically appointed ignoramus of a judge, those heavy-headed, low-browed, half-witted jurymen, that poor Brownie could never shoot anybody. Moreover, there was no weapon found,

on or near him. "Justice"!!! And I, who taught him to be what he was, am respected, honored and deferred to, the husband of that Miss Mary whom poor Brownie was much too honorable to have married even if she had been willing, the heir and successor of "the best mayor the town ever had," a power for good in my community, an enemy of graft and corruption. But they hanged poor Brownie.

III. THE EAGER PREY

If he wasn't "there" with the coin to play,
He'd make a talk to some youth blasé
And mine host would spread for the eager prey,
And give him the steer-per-cent.

Ballad of Blanding.

THE reason why all people, even the most fastidious, love melodrama is because Nature herself is melodramatic—although one seldom catches her at it. Her plots are too finely drawn out for the average eye to connect incidents that seem totally unconnected. Hence, much talk of an universe without a purpose—on its face contradictory, the one huge basic fact upon which all philosophies and religions are built being that of the planetary system revolving steadily about the sun.

Occasionally, by some lucky accident, all the facts in certain cases become known; then we are privileged to see how petty are human-made plots compared to one of Nature's. Such an one is the basis of the history of Dyke Sturtevant and Milly Malone; and were we actuated by purely mercenary motives, we would make it into a melodrama one week of whose royalties would yield more than any magazine could afford to pay for this story.

I

MILLY MALONE had been on Broadway a very short time before Dyke Sturtevant saw and admired her. Many times

had the house-manager sought her with news of the spoken admiration of young Mr. This and old Mr. That; but Milly had fallen into a habit of saying "No," and continued, though she really yearned for the brilliantly lighted supper-places, the taxicabs, and the cabaret dances that colored her companion's stories. Of late there has been much rubbish written about stage-girls having no more temptations than others: yet to any metropolitan theater during the run of a successful "girl" show gravitate the rich idlers from all cities—first, because the primitive entertainment there afforded is best suited their mental incapacities, second, because it is part of their system to have, just as they have expensive polo-ponies for daylight amusement, expensive females for nocturnal supper-parties—and many were quite willing that Milly should be expensive.

Milly, rejecting this generosity, gained a growing unpopularity among her sisters of the dressing-room. But, observing her running for a street-car in the rain, or in freezing weather muffling up her thin, girlish neck with a cheap fur stole when proffered taxicabs offered luxurious protection, the "Johns," though apt to call her a qualified lunatic, respected her pluck and told others to disprove coarse generalities circulated about the chorus. Among those who thus heard of Milly was Dyke Sturtevant; and, hearing, he laughed loudly:

"Pooh and pish! Likewise tush!" said Dyke. "Also, Bah!" The other insisted that he was quoting personal experience: had he not so proffered, on a snowy night, too. Holmes had been along. There had been Anthony and Barkwynd and Stetson, also, and others: why, it was notorious.

Dyke continued to deride. "Coarse work," he explained. "Bet me I won't have her out to dinner in a week?"

"It's like finding money," returned his fellow-clubman. So the curtain rose on Act II of the life of Mr. Sturtevant.

II

BUT we are hardly concerned with the mechanics of the plot—rather, to show what went on behind the scenes; therefore, we must transfer our attention to Blanding, who was to some extent the master-mechanic. Blanding was as well-known to Fifth Avenue as to Broadway. He maintained membership in a semi-exclusive club, and was one of those persons whom the vague description of “little brothers of the rich” seems to suit. Yet show-girls instinctively regarded him as one of themselves and made no attempt to extort money from him by fictitious stories, or otherwise. “He’s a wise one,” one often whispered to another, as a signal she, too, might drop the wearisome task of holding an unnatural pose. Touts never offered him “stable-tips”: there was never any eagerness shown by professional gamblers for him to enter a game. Those “on the make” looked elsewhere; there was a shrewd suspicion among them that despite his air of London assurance, Cork Street clothes, and Harvard accent, he was like themselves.

Some even knew the truth about Blanding, but so far apart are the worlds of Broadway and the Avenue, so well sustained was the principle of “never wising-up a sucker,” that no whisper of Blanding’s connection with Barney Bond’s gambling-house was ever wafted east of Sixth Avenue. As a matter of fact, Blanding owned a half-interest in this house, where none was admitted unless of the sort that wears dress clothes more than occasionally. Blanding had supplied most of the patrons as well as most of the original investment.

Ever since Dyke Sturtevant had inherited the fortune of his uncle, head of the banking-house of the same name, Blanding’s eye had been upon him; but for some reason—probably because Dyke had been kept on short commons dur-

ing his school and university years—he had shown no chance of profiting so expensive a place as Barney's; twice visiting it, as he had visited others, he had played with ten and twenty-dollar chips only, yawned after a brief space, and departed. Yet Blanding knew the instinct must be within him—Dyke's father had plunged on unlisted securities as would no man not crazy with belief in his luck. It is doubtful if Blanding would have had the cruelty to awaken an instinct so terrible had not Dyke run amuck along the Nightless Lane, ever since his grandfather died, showing an utter disregard for the harm he did others. Subconsciously at least, this gave Blanding an excuse to treat him as an enemy. But it was not until Sturtevant came to be seen about with Milly Malone that Blanding saw a chance worth acting upon.

Blanding used Sturtevant's trick to meet Milly, giving not a supper, but a "tea" at his apartments, and bidding some girls to bring Milly on pain of his displeasure. But Milly, having broken her rule once, was not difficult to persuade—particularly, as it was Blanding, whose praises all chanted. He was never "fresh"; you must make advances if any were to be made; and, to those who know women, it will not seem strange when we say that this was a far more effectual way to win them than the usual one. And Milly fell under his spell as other girls had done—not that she loved him, but, somehow, she trusted him; and he had no such difficulty in arranging a future *tête-à-tête*, as had Sturtevant several weeks previous. Blanding's was for the following afternoon at an hotel where he would be likely to encounter neither his acquaintances of the "smart" world nor the other; consequently, without interruptions, he was able, by exerting himself to establish what was almost a friendship—which permitted him, before dark, to approach the subject of Dyke Sturtevant.

"You will pardon me, Milly," said Blanding, "but if I am

wrong, correct me. You came here to-day in a taxicab and it's waiting for you: in fact, it's always waiting. It takes you shopping to places where you have charge-accounts and can order any amount of clothes. It takes you to restaurants where you can entertain your girl friends at tea or dinner—also charge-accounts. And you have been invited to move from your boarding-house to a charming apartment. When it grows too warm here, an European trip for yourself and maid."

Milly was chalky white. "How dare you?" she gasped. "Come," said Blanding, kindly. "I'm talking to you like a father." She averted her eyes. "How *could* he *tell* anybody. And he was so decent, so kind, never saying anything that anybody couldn't respect him for."

"You do him an injustice," said Blanding, softly. "He never told anybody."

"Oh, he must have," she declared passionately. "You couldn't have known unless. But it was just because he had more money than he knew what to do with."

"I know," smiled Blanding. "He knew you were a good girl and wanted to show you there were some good *men* left. It was because you *were* good that he was attracted to you." (And, God forgive him, that was true enough!) "Somehow, you imagined he wasn't the kind to fall in love quickly. But if you tried to be the kind of girl he *could* love, why—he didn't exactly say he'd marry you, but—that was what you thought, wasn't it?"

For answer, the girl bent over, her face meeting her handkerchief, for which she had fumbled. "Don't, my dear *child*," protested Blanding. "People will think I'm abusing you. How did I *know*? Because it's his *system*. Want me to show you?"

They were driven to another restaurant, from entering which she shrank instinctively. "It's only for a moment,"

Blanding assured her. "And it's necessary." Within was a painted world where, before nightfall, were already the drunk and disorderly. Outside was the fading glory of a winter's afternoon, but within, Nature was allowed to play no tricks with complexions, the lights matching them. Entering it was as if to step into a Roman hell.

At tables sat women of small fascination, striving their best for a semblance of gaiety, and for the most part, failing even to produce a passable counterfeit. Among them was one as vivid as the poppies on her hat; why was she there? A closer glance revealed that her charm was almost entirely due to cosmetics, although she had the small head of the Golden Age Greek. Her eyes had once been compared by a poet to woodland pools in the sedge with starlight shining through; now the pools had dried and the starlight was gone. Her little Grecian nose twitched like the beak of a bird of prey. The expert would have told you she had taken a larger dose than usual of her habitual heroin—which, equally with deadening physical pain and thoughts of the past, provides rapid transit to eternity.

"That's why we came," said Blanding. "That girl! Six years since Sturtevant met her. A brainless little flapper, but a beauty. Went home every night; couldn't bribe her to take a drink: 'I guess you don't know a lady when you see one.' 'You wouldn't respect me if I smoked a cigarette'—that kind. Kept 'steady company' with a young book-keeper. Had their Harlem flat all picked out and went on trips to the furniture-houses. But, meanwhile, other girls got more elegant elevator apartments on the 'Drive' and in the 'seventies.' Silk curtains and Oriental rugs and Louis Quinze furniture and dainty damask, and so on, and they made her mighty discontented with what instalment-houses sell to the righteous. Hated to feel her rough pony-skin coat, too, after touching other girls' seals or chincillas. Still, she'd have gone

through if Sturtevant hadn't come along. He gave her everything he's given you. Then—know what his game is?"

Milly shook her head dumbly, although, instinctively, she knew well enough. She had been unable to remove her eyes from the girl whose history she was hearing: a history that might have been her own.

"Why, he tells you that he's married: unhappy, of course, wife a Catholic, and, although since he's met you, he's begged for a divorce, nothing doing. So he is helpless, having done all in honor that anybody could. See the point? He's lonely, must have love. You're his true wife before high heaven—what means the mumbling of a priest? Well, all that's well enough for sensible women who are able to see through a man's words into his mind and know that he really loves them—but he's a connoisseur in women as others are in wines. And the sort of girls he selects are the sort that, respectability *gone*, all's gone: that's the religious temperament—your temperament, too, I think."

He waved the waiter away, indicating their untouched liqueurs. "Some girls really get to care for him—why wouldn't they? He's handsome, clever talker, fairy prince with a magic wand—and they fall for the love talk. But, even without love, they fall anyway. Why? Because he never plays his hand until the girl can't go back to boarding-house grub, street-cars, and dingy furnished rooms. So, when he says, 'Good-bye, forever; I am going to Africa to hunt lions, or India to hunt tigers; I hope one of them gets me,'—then she sees plainly that this means giving up apartment, maid, taxicab, charge-accounts. For—observe this particularly—he has never insulted her with actual money; his jewelry has been Lalique stuff, expensive, as *art nouveau*, but worthless to raise money on. No solitaires, no cash. Do you see the point, *now?*"

"I—I think I do," said Milly, gasping. "Let's go." She

seemed suddenly to choke in that atmosphere, heavy with cheap perfumes and dead cigarettes; where the other girl sat was only a burning mist. . . .

Blanding told the driver to go around the Park. "So," he went on, as the car swung away from the curb, "because she can't get the luxuries he's made her think she needs, any other way—she tells him not to go. But, after a while, his artistic soul wants something unexplored. So she loses the luxuries anyway. It's only a question of months—maybe a year; and though she has a few more clothes, a few more toilet-trifles in gold, she needs cash just as much.

"What happens? Another man. If she's a sentimental idiot, like the poppy girl, she takes to drinking, then to cocaine, heroin, or morphine; and soon she loses all attraction for the Sturtevant sort. Then she hits the toboggan—and that place back there's not the bottom, either."

Milly Malone burst into violent shivering and caught Blanding's hand—then into wild sobbing. "There, there, little one: I understand," he said paternally, patting her palm. "Thinking how you'll hate to give up all those luxuries yourself, even after a few weeks? Well, you don't have to. *You don't have to.*"

She sat upright, tears and terrors forgotten in amazement. "After what you've told me?"

"I've warned you," returned Blanding. "So: beat his game—understand?"

Apparently, she did not. "Well, d'you *love* the fellow?" asked Blanding sharply. Apparently, *No* again. "Well," he said, "some day you may read a philosopher named Faber, who says God sent the poor as eagles to strip the rich. Farther back, in a grand old Book that nobody reads any more you will see this passage: 'Live by the sword, perish by the sword.' The trouble with the poor is that they're slaves of words. Blackmail for instance. It never seems to

occur to anybody that whoever can be *blackmailed* should have been *blackballed*—or that blackmailers only exact what the man ought to have paid society. Cursed with sentimentalism, too, the poor are; and sentimentalism is the greatest enemy of reform. So, being poor, you're a slave of words and sentimental, so I suppose you won't turn Sturtevant's swords against him."

So scornful was he that Milly, more from a wish to retain his respect than anything else—and not half understanding—hastened to assure him that she *would*. "Only what can I *do*?" she asked fretfully. "*Me?*"

"I'd tell you if I thought I wasn't wasting my time," said Blanding.

A picture of the poppy girl crossed her vision. "You won't be wasting it," said she, snapping her sharp little teeth together.

On his explanation, the curtain fell upon Act II of the life of Dyke Sturtevant.

III

ONE of Nature's ironies is to punish us through our good emotions, not our evil ones. One intent on evil is careful, alert, watchful; and, anticipating harm, it seldom befalls him. But, intent on good, following a heart instead of a head, the heart is easily betrayed because one wants it to be. *Strephon* does not wish to be told that *Amaryllis* hates him, nor an infatuated husband his wife; both prefer to believe that to them alone is given some astral knowledge not possible to material minds. So Milly might have played her game with half her skill; for Nature, making a long arm, had caught up Master Sturtevant, and he was in love at last. He had gone into Milly's case on a bet, true, but before seeing her;

and afterward, he had followed his usual system because where was there a better one? Every effect in it had been planned to suggest sincerity; and now he was in the peculiar position of a playwright who finds himself living a situation of his own play and using his careful dramatic phrasing because no natural dialogue half so good suggests itself.

A curious situation indeed. Often words leaped to his lips, quite sincerely, but he blushed and abandoned them, remembering their unhallowed use in the past. Like all men who help to make the world worse, he insisted strongly that no hint of evil be associated with this one real affair. He resumed boyish idealism and chivalry toward women; for truly he had possessed both. The worst villain is most frequently but a betrayed idealist. Because the women of his early days had been other than of an Arthurian idyl. Sturtevant had gone to a Byronic extreme. Some men have minds so very juvenile that they can be only *Sir Galahads* or *Don Juans*—both the conceptions of schoolboys. He had never really cared for *Don Juanism*—had been cynically daring women to live up to his ideal. If the girl of the poppies or any of the others had brought out the better part of him, he would have been ashamed to cut adrift. Bringing out his worst, they gave him an excuse, and, finally tired, not so much of them as of himself and his surroundings, he would go a-questing elsewhere. *Don Juan* sought a Grail as truly as *Galahad*—his from which to quaff a nectar of ideal love. Sturtevant had defended his system by telling himself such girls were bound to go that way some time.

But he told himself no such tales of Milly. He drifted along, much in her company, wishing he could bear her away from the iniquitous atmosphere of musical comedy and of Broadway. With his consent, she was never permitted on the Nightless Lane except for the theater. When they dined or supped he took her to Canary's or the St. Gothard, de-

fiantly meeting the eyes of his Avenue friends and inviting their criticism.

The attitude made it difficult to suggest anything so alien as a visit to a roulette-table. But Blanding managed it. Protesting, Sturtevant had secured a table at Sydenham's for the celebrated Broadway New Year festivities. Milly had opened her ingenuous eyes wide when asking. "I've never seen it, fancy: and in New York all my life hearing and reading of it! I,"—she gave him a smile, the effect carefully calculated—"never met a man before I'd trust to take me."

She spoke to him always with clipped precision, never a natural phrase escaping her; she knew the speech of her childhood was not to be trusted; and having made a certain impression, she wished to retain it—even going so far as to tell him of her convent-school education, her father having been a man of some position who had failed in business. It had never occurred to her to deceive anyone as to this before, and to keep up the illusion made her uncomfortable in his presence, desirous of being in it just as little as possible—something that often happens between such girls and such men and helps destroy any possibility of them ever understanding one another. As often as she could manage it, another girl accompanied them, and the two would have much fun afterwards between munches of his expensive candy, chuckling over the way he had swallowed her lies.

Ethel accompanied them on this New Year's night, and that was part of Blanding's plot; for, at the height of the festivities, she recognized Blanding himself (Milly was not supposed to know him), apparently searching for some one. She sent over a waiter and made a point of his joining them. He was looking for certain people, it appeared: some men and women Sturtevant knew. "Polly Van Reypen wanted, particularly, to go out to that new roulette-place," Blanding told them, "and you have to have somebody with you the

people there know. Polly made such a bother about it, I cut another party and here she's gone. Oh, well"—he looked at his watch—"I didn't realize how late it was."

"A roulette-salon—for women?" said Ethel, clapping her hands. She was an experienced one, was Ethel, and although her childish ways and baby face did not lay her open to any such suspicion, she was on Blanding's permanent pay-roll. He had sent her to Milly. "Goody! goody! goody!" she exclaimed. "Take me, Mr. Blanding—please." Blanding laughed tolerantly. "These were rich women, child," he said. "I wouldn't lead anybody else into temptation, even by request." Ethel's face grew doleful. "Oh! it would have been such fun, wouldn't it, Milly? Just like the stories you read of Monte Carlo. I never knew there *was* a place women could go to."

Milly's face brightened. She had been sulking, purposefully, telling Sturtevant what a disappointment the celebration had been. "Let's go, Mr. Sturtevant," she said, laying a little paw of a hand on the arm of his dress-coat. "Please—maybe we'd have some fun, *there*." He was thrilled by her touch. "On one condition," he returned in a low tone, "—that, for the last time, you call me *Mr.* Sturtevant. How often have I asked you?"

"Dyke," she amended, making a pretty little mouth.

He turned to Blanding to be assured of the sort of people who went there. "Not—this sort," returned Blanding, contemptuously, nodding toward a table surrounded by celebrities of the cabarets. "It's hard to get into—like a good club, almost. Laura Allen took *me* there." The second prominent young matron's name was sufficient to convince Sturtevant that the atmosphere of the place would not clash with that of his ideal. As a matter of fact, there had been no such place until Blanding's first serious conversation with Milly. Then Barney Bond had pressed into additional service the

house next door, heretofore used only for millionaires' private poker-parties. Not a hundred people knew this sober-looking brownstone dwelling had any connection with the equally sober-looking, but quite notorious one next door. So Blanding had Barney move in a roulette-table, some paintings, statuary and a buffet, and after Blanding telephoned that New Year's night while Sturtevant was paying the supper-check, bright lights reflected on the crystal and cut glass, illuminated the green cloth.

Then and there Milly developed the gambling habit—coming the next night, every night; and, since ladies were provided with black lace masks by the management, and the patronage seemed confined to those desirous of hiding their identities, Sturtevant had no great objection to her childish amusement over winning small sums. For she seldom lost—nor, apparently, did the other masked ladies and their dress-coated escorts, for the very good reason that all were employees of Bond and Blanding, on the pay-roll as “steerers” outside, “shillabers” within; a “steerer” is one who brings customers, and half the pretty show-girls with “Avenue” acquaintances are that, receiving a large share of their friends' losses. Blanding had never used women for shillabers before; but many of his male steerers had been so employed next door, betting large sums and always winning larger ones, to encourage losers disgusted with luck, thus reviving hope and renewing play. Men and women alike were shillabers here in the women's room; Ethel herself, her coiffure and gown new, often stood, later, alongside Sturtevant, who did not know her behind her lace mask. He imagined every one of these silent winning players to have names in the “Social Register.”

In such an electric atmosphere of luck, then, it was not strange that Sturtevant soon took a hand, and he was the only one who cost the firm of Bond and Blanding anything

in winnings—all the rest being handed back before the players left the house. But soon Sturtevant, flushed with luck and thoroughly surrendering himself to the intoxication of chance, laid down his accumulations on a single number: his first real bet. The croupier with his long-handled wooden rake pushed back all but one bill. "The maximum is ten dollars *en plan*," he said mildly. He spun. "*Quinze, noir, impair et passe*," he said, designating number, color, and so forth, bets on which were to be paid, among them Sturtevant's. The whole game had been played to reach this point.

Sturtevant gathered in his winnings, grumbling at the amount: with his luck he would have won thousands. "What a piker's game," he said in disgust. The croupier shrugged his shoulders. "For men, maybe," he said, "not for ladies. The house next door may please *you* better."

The gambling spirit is a curious thing. It possesses one not entirely for gain—else why do those have it who hire clerks to clip coupons? It is a sort of religion rather, a subconscious belief that one has established communication with the spirit-world—has been especially favored with prophetic instinct, which, persistently followed, will triumphantly defeat materialism and the statistics regarding the laws of chance. And to be under this spell is to disregard all but blind belief. Gambling is the apotheosis of faith: no Fox's martyr could be more of a fanatic than a gambler. Once aroused, Blanding knew the rest was easy. And finally, it was aroused, Sturtevant asked Milly to wait, and plunged to the street and next door.

The game, which had broken up immediately after Dyke's departure, had been abandoned by the yawning shillabers long before he returned. Milly had gone home. Stricken with remorse for his discourtesy, he realized it was dawn: he had played five hours and lost twenty-five thousand dollars.

Never mind; he would get it all back to-morrow. That

was only his punishment because he hadn't gone next door sooner, while Luck was with him: why, if he had only been in Barney Bond's, the croupier would not have pushed away those three hundred odd dollars and he would have won, instead of three sixty, over eleven thousand. If man could make for his own inconsistency half the excuses he makes for Luck's, he would have no conscience.

After that it was too pitifully easy; but neither Blanding nor Milly got as much of the loot as Blanding had expected. Sturtevant went from house to house—was soon a familiar in them all. Finally, to recoup, he went after bigger gambles in Wall Street. Then he evolved a system: an absolutely logical and flawless system before which all the Laws of Chance must fall like Jericho's walls. At this point his history ceases to be interesting.

IV

IN a block where gambling-houses abound is the rear entrance of Sydenham's, an inconspicuous door on a dark street which does not suggest even a remote connection with the brightly lighted restaurant on Broadway—a theory evidently held by Dyke Sturtevant, too, on his first visit by the back way. It opens on a dimly lighted hall where, faintly, can be heard the music and gayety of the Broadway side, the ragtime from private dining-rooms, mingled with the kitchen's clatter. Dyke made his way to the stairs; and there, under a bracket light, he was recognized and halted at the door of an upstairs room.

"You can't go in there, sir," said a waiter-captain just coming out.

Sturtevant smiled at the tribute to his impeccable dress-clothes, shining hat and shoes. "Why not?" he asked.

A man, in similar attire to his, passed swiftly out of the room. "He, too?" asked Dyke, astounded. The man belonged to at least two clubs. "If he's at this," he said more to himself than to the waiter, "*I* needn't be ashamed." He touched the waiter's arm: "Why did you stop me from going in there?"

The waiter regarded him uneasily. "I thought p'raps somebody might 'ave blown the gaff—that you came to raise a row." His tone had ceased to be respectful, became comrade-like. "Well, Mr. Sturtevant, as you remarked, there's just as good in there and will be. We all 'as ups and downs, sir." He opened the door as one man to another. Sturtevant passed in.

Here was only one waiter and he was dozing. Mostly, the patrons—though quite as expensively dressed as any below—were eating supper as people one of whose regular meals is at this hour. There was very little drinking; on most tables stood bottles of vichy or mineral waters. The air of those who supped was not unlike that of business-folk at lunch. Men and women seemed acquaintances of long-standing, all appearances of coquetry abandoned. Some men even read the papers; others wrote letters. It was not unlike any ordinary European café—not the sort foreigners frequent, but the European's club where women are permitted only if they do not interfere. There was even a couple playing (not dominoes, 'tis true; one can't have everything) double-Canfield.

But Sturtevant saw none of these things—only Milly Malone in a secluded corner, finishing supper and talking to Ethel and to a man Sturtevant had often seen along Broadway. He stopped suddenly as one who has received a blinding blow. When he recovered, the psychic force of his shock had communicated itself to Milly and she stared in terrified

dismay. Sturtevant continued, mechanically, as one who is pushed or led, and sank into a chair opposite her.

"Now, Dyke," said Ethel calmly, "don't make a scene. Who let you in here? Who told you? Where've you been for the past six months?" She strove to make her tone casual. The other man said something unimportant about the queer results from the Jaurez racetrack, that day. Milly tried to speak once, twice, then gave it up. It was almost as difficult for Sturtevant to find his voice, and when he did it was hardly his own, but a queer, choking one nobody had ever heard before:

"To answer your questions chronologically, Ethel. First: I let *myself* in. Second, Harvey Gold sent me. Third, I've been in a sanitarium."

The last was not surprising to Ethel. But that Harvey Gold, proprietor of another place like Barney Bond's, should have sent this pigeon he had so often plucked here, in the midst of his pluckers! Sturtevant understood her bewilderment:

"You see," he explained, laughing harshly, "I've *joined* you. I tried to borrow but Gold said 'earn it.' So I took him a nice young man who belongs to my club and I'm waiting here until Harvey 'phones me to come and get my—what-do-you-call-it—it's my first experience, you see."

"Steerer's end? Steer-per-cent?" suggested the other man, smiling. He took this as a good cue to leave them, for he perceived private matters were brewing.

Sturtevant looked at Milly. She was stony-white.

"Still at it?" he asked in a light voice that was very ugly.

"How long have you known?" asked Ethel, white also.

"Known?" returned Sturtevant, his laugh uglier than his voice. "Known? I was still thinking she was the pearl of purity when I came in here: it was losing *her* I minded, not my money. All I've gone through in the past two years didn't

hurt as much as the last two minutes." He looked at Milly again. "*You!*" he said. "Just think of it, *you!* Why, I wanted to marry *you.*"

"You can cut all that stuff out, Dyke," said Ethel. "She had your number when you started—knew all about that marriage-stuff and how you pulled it on all the others. This time, *you* lost. So be a game sport and don't whine. You only got *yours.*"

"My God," said Sturtevant hoarsely, "look at me! Why would I lie *now* when I haven't got a chance. I tell you it was on the square. I wanted to *marry* her." He laughed harshly. "Oh! that's the funny part of it: She was giving *her* money to those harpies, her *own* money. She could have had every cent I owned. *Her own money!*" Something in his tone carried conviction. Ethel looked at Milly, horror-stricken. This was ghastly. She had deliberately robbed herself of a fortune.

"Well, I *must* say," she gasped, catching Milly's hand, "isn't life *horrible?* Oh, Mil'! And I *helped* you. Me!" It seemed to her, a child of dire poverty, that this was the most terrible tragedy that had ever happened. Milly might have had everything her heart desired; and here she was sitting in the "steerers' room" at Sydenham's.

But—such is the strange psychology of the feminine mind—Milly was not thinking of the money at all. She was remembering the many times Dyke had said he loved her, and how she had forced herself to remember the poppy girl. Since Dyke had explained, a few moments before, the brakes Blanding's first interview had applied to her natural emotions were released, and now she recalled Dyke's tender thoughtfulness for her: how, motoring, and caught in a chilly wind one day, he had taken off his coat and held it, despite her protests, about her thin-charmeuse-covered shoulders. The action, the thrill of his strength and touch, had brought a

queer tingling sensation that she had choked down. Sometimes when he had sat, silent, she remembered an almost uncontrollable impulse to ruffle his sleekly groomed hair. Once, dancing one of the new tangoes in which she must sway back into his arms, she knew when she closed her eyes her pulse had beaten so rapidly she feared he must hear it. At another time . . . but there were numberless others, each emotion killed before it could bud, either by determined resolve to remember the poppy girl or because she must use all her wits to beat him at his game. It was not strange she hadn't suspected it before; but it was the simple explanation of why, when Sturtevant hit the toboggan, she had striven with him, begged him to discontinue gambling. "Say you love me, then," he would return, fiercely. But there he was up to old tricks again and she must defend herself. And, then, when he had disappeared, leaving no word, she had moped, had desired to be alone, to weep in secret. She had told herself with many stamps of the foot that she was low-spirited, needed a change—any explanation save the obvious one. So that was why she was not thinking about money. Those who know womenkind, therefore, will not wonder at her first words to him:

"Ethel, tell him how I happened to be here to-night?" With that remarkable thing called, in women, instinct, she knew anything might be forgiven that had not to do with other men. "Tell him, Ethel, tell him," she insisted feverishly.

Ethel's mind left money and, swiftly, did the right thing by the same incomprehensible process: "Why, this is *my* party, Dyke," she explained. "Milly won't go anywhere. She's like she used to be before you met her. So I happened to have business here. Oh, yes," she broke off to be defiant, "I *am* waiting for the same reason *you* are, Dyke. But she *isn't*. I just 'phoned her I was lonely—to come have supper

while I waited. She hasn't been out with *anybody* since you disappeared. You needn't glare so: she *hasn't*."

Curiously—Dyke could never have explained why—half the horror of the situation left him. Milly had "steered" him, yes; but that lost most of its first shock now he was of her world, no longer an outsider, and realized how bitterly simple it was to descend to such practices when money was needed. He *had* been a beast to those other girls. So Milly had known of it—no wonder she hadn't believed him, poor kid, no wonder! But—oh the pity of it—if she only had believed!

"Milly, I *did* love you," he choked, winking hard to keep his eyes clear.

"*Did?*" she asked, dully.

"*Do.* Always shall, but,"—hopelessly—"what's the use now? I haven't a nickel. Not a nickel. Every red cent is gone! We always *get* it, don't we?"

Milly's hand slipped into his. "Oh, Dyke," she said. He stared at her, unbelievably. Ethel arose, swiftly, and departed. Milly was crying. "Oh, Dyke, Dyke, Dyke!" she wept. "I'm so sorry. But was it *my* fault, *was* it, *was* it?"

And, then, with sudden ferocity:

"I won't have you stopping here, waiting for Harvey Gold. I've got money, your money; you don't *need* to do anything like that. I won't let you. You come with me, come right away. I won't have you here."

She even forgot to say good-night to Ethel. In the taxicab, she put both arms around him and cried all the way to her apartment; but somehow, both were strangely happy. At the door of her apartment, when he hesitated, she clung to him:

"Don't leave me, Dyke; don't ever, ever leave me again. . . ."

V

IN the varieties, Mr. and Mrs. Sturtevant have achieved much success with their little playlet, "At the Foot of the Moon-Path," written by Dyke himself, after Milly had urged that in vaudeville only could they both work without enforced separations, or idleness for either, and after he had condemned as too ridiculous all the "sketches" and *levers de rideaux* submitted. Hers had been one eye that had seen the patent dissatisfaction of variety's audiences with cheap playlets, "house" scenery and borrowed props. A high-priced scenic artist had been told "expense was no object," and they carried a special electrician for their light effects. Their wisdom was confirmed each night for their "opening" always got a "hand."

Milly wears gowns especially designed and executed by an *atelier*—no less—as do the other women of the company. Dyke sees to it that the men's dress-clothes are cut after his own pattern; and while, of course, low-salaried actors cannot be expected to look like *him*—to the dress-coat born—still, the whole affair gives an excellent simulation of an incident that might have happened to "smart" people in surroundings *à la mode*. And how the bourgeois soul hungers for such glimpses! How useful the language learned, to parrot to others, the hints on what the "real sort" wear. The patrons of the circuits look forward eagerly to the return, each year, of those headliners, Mr. and Mrs. Dyke Sturtevant.

But Dyke, off the stage, drops all the manners of aristocracy as delineated on. He takes an odd pleasure in meeting the "rough-necks" of the profession on an equal footing, and in "wise-cracking stuff" he excels them all. Abysmal is his contempt for the rich.

"I tell you," he often says, "they don't know anything

about *life*. How can they, with an army camping on their door-steps from birth, trying to get their dough away? The unluckiest bunch in the world, I tell you. And they never get wise unless they're taken for the 'works' like I was."

"Oh hush, Dyke," Milly will say. And to the listener: "Isn't he awful?" And she kisses him to prove it.

IV. THE PALACE OF WISDOM

ANY great truth is half a lie: its falsity no less than its truth proving its greatness. So, if we say: "it is not MORALS but MEN," we should be right; but, unfortunately, we are not wrong when we say it is not MEN but MORALS. Thus, when the great William Blake wrote: "The Road of Excess leads to the Palace of Wisdom," he was an angel voicing a divine truth; but (to continue to borrow, momentarily, the style of G. K. C.) he was also a devil uttering a damnable lie.

The story of Anson Eagle and his shadow, Asa Winthrop, proves both contentions.

I

BLAKE also wrote: "If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise." But here he was undoubtedly *all* wrong. Had he said: "If the wise man persists in folly he will become wiser," he would have summed up to the case of H. Anson Eagle: but Blake referred to such men as Asa Winthrop, and Asa, far from becoming wise, became a greater fool; although to begin with he was not any more of a fool than Eagle was. Winthrop had the same ambitions, aspirations and dreams of pleasure, but he lacked Eagle's self-possession: as some would say, wrongly, his conceit. Eagle never forgot he had the future to consider; never put both hands to the cup and drained it. He always saved some for to-morrow, yet to associate prudence with his romantic personality is to invite ridicule.

The world is divided into two classes: the first do as they think fit, regardless of others' opinions; the second take their opinions ready made, and sin in secret, but are less the slaves of the first class than of their own cowardice. But the first class is not wholly admirable; a murderer may belong to it as much as a saint. To be regardless of the world's opinions is not always to be right, and Asa Winthrop was seldom right. He was merely in rebellion, and was never quite sure what he was rebelling about. He stumbled through a militant boyhood, sullen and stubborn, the despair of parents and teachers and equally unadmired by boys. While his character was forming at college, he heard of Anson Eagle, and that young gentleman seemed to his mind to be himself with greater privileges. So, as he was too wise to worship God, he worshiped a man, reading eagerly of Eagle's exploits and, later, endeavoring anxiously to insinuate himself into that set wherein Eagle moved.

There are some writers who, like Byron, begin to influence their age long before their writings are sufficiently sophisticated to influence anybody. Eagle was such a one: a newspaper hero. Anson Eagle broke into Associated Press dispatches before passing his first decade, when, as the leader of a band organized along the broad, free lines of the half-dime train-robbers series, he ended in the Juvenile Court, and convulsed a continent with his fearless confessions, taking all blame upon himself and bidding the judge be indulgent with his "boys." After that his life could be read in the daily press: no incident too small to chronicle: Anson Eagle in school fighting the bully and pinning his hand to a desk with a pack-knife; his expulsion; his enlistment in '98 and his disobedience of orders which brought him a court-martial for insubordination and later, a medal for bravery; his adventures as an officer of the Philippine Constabulary (mostly lies); his exploits against smugglers as an officer of the

Philippine customs (greater lies, still). A parcel of extravagant stories were printed, and when Eagle returned to the States he found women ready to idolize him.

Men hated him—they always hate the favorites of women; and Eagle encouraged their hatred, for he despised them. A picture of him at that time shows a slim, upstanding youth with a fine forehead and eyes, reckless lips, a sneering tilt to his nose. His clothes were London made: of soft, costly materials, and form-fitting. He wore soft collars of silk held stiff by concealed celluloid strips, and neckties in golds, greens and crimsons. One would have turned again to view him if only for his attire, contrasting so vividly with the dull, drab, formless American clothes of yesterday. Then, too, he seemed just to have bathed and brushed his shining hair: another contrast.

II

WINTHROP first saw Eagle in the flesh one Saturday night in Sydenham's, that great, gilt Longacre restaurant. Eagle, at that time, had had his first success as a writer, due almost altogether to the picturesque topics he wrote about rather than any real literary worth; although even then his hasty, unpolished style showed promise. But Winthrop saw the man in the stories and thought them masterpieces. Now that he saw the man himself, he was not disappointed: Eagle was what the pictures of magazine heroes strive to be. Opposite him at table was a widely photographed beauty of the stage to whom he listened, casually, as one whose mind wanders afar.

"Waiter," said Winthrop, "what is that gentleman doing?" Eagle had placed a lump of sugar upon a pierced spoon and was carefully saturating it with water, a drop at a time. "*Absinthe française*," returned the waiter. "Absinthe drip."

"Fetch me some," said Winthrop. The waiter brought Pernod Fils, a carafe, sugar, a spoon, and instructed him. Winthrop disliked the paregoric taste but, seeing that Eagle encored his, did likewise. Then came soft, reposeful thoughts, and, as he sat, languidly, he saw his destiny on the job working out his life to a satisfactory, even thrilling, conclusion. Words leaped to lips hitherto, restrained; those whom he met that night found him a boon companion. Some old acquaintances remarked upon his astonishing improvement. A celebrated person did him the honor of listening attentively to his revolutionary views upon sex.

The next night he took absinthe again, and continued for more than a year, until it was not a couple but a dozen a day. By the time he saw Eagle again it had begun to tell on Winthrop; his complexion was pasty, his eyes dull when not drinking; he ate scarcely enough to keep alive. All this he attributed to anything rather than the absinthe; he invented imaginary hereditary weaknesses and diseases. And, if any claimed absinthe was hurting his work, he would flash upon them any one of half a dozen short stories by Eagle. Eagle's work was improving: his style was less hurried, more musical, his subjects less bizarre, more probable, nearer life. "Don't look like it hurts *his* work, does it?" Winthrop would ask triumphantly. "And he takes it, one right after another." Sometimes he exhibited, more modestly, some newspaper "story" of his own written under the same influence. To balance its temporary felicity of expression his city editor could have shown you many written in dull, crabbed English, half the facts uninvestigated, as was plainly shown by numerous instances of "it is said," "it is rumored," and "we hear from good authority."

It was on the night of his discharge from the *Star* that he saw Anson Eagle, apparently unchanged since the year before: still clear of skin and eye, faintly ruddy of cheek,

erect, springy. Winthrop rejoiced; his own hereditary afflictions *were* facts then, else why was Eagle unaffected? He was not even careless of his dress: his pleated linen shirt, double cuffs and soft collar were as immaculate as his polished finger nails, his mane of black hair as shining from much brushing as ever. He swung a stick and whistled as he walked. Winthrop, made bold by a recent drink, hurried after and accosted him; and Eagle, finding his eager discipleship pleasing, consented to an adjournment to a nearby bar. He ordered lemon seltzer. Winthrop, amazed and hurt, mixed his absinthe silently.

"You drink that stuff?" asked Eagle. "Cut it out, my boy; it's rotten." Winthrop could restrain himself no longer. "But I saw *you*—" he began. "Experience—simply experience," returned Eagle. "How else can you learn? Absinthe helped me, and I quit it before it could hurt me." "And you don't drink *anything*?" asked Winthrop. Eagle winked. "I've found something that makes that look like a two-spot," he said. "No, I never drink any more. The two things don't go together."

"What two things?" asked Winthrop. "Drink," returned Eagle, "and"—he winked again—"something else. Look here," he said, "I'll show you if you like. You"—he surveyed the reporter, compassionately—"look like you're in a bad way from that rotten stuff. Don't touch it; come along with me."

Outside he hailed a hansom and gave an address in the upper forties. Winthrop thrilled. At last he was intimate with his hero. He looked anxiously to be sure the hero had no flaws; but, from his shining hair to his shining boots, Eagle was scrupulously immaculate and smartly groomed. His slender figure, too, his curiously illumined, intelligent eyes, and his flow of satirical, iconoclastic conversation made him more Winthrop's king than ever: whatever *he* did was *right*.

He had not explained where they were going nor what they would do there. "Just keep your mouth shut and do what I do," he said, "and nobody'll know you're green." The car stopped before a dark house in a dark crosstown block. Eagle pushed sharply three times the electric button beside the basement door. A Chinese opened the inner door, protected by an outer grill of ironwork, recognized Eagle, but hesitated at the sight of Winthrop. "Him all belong plover," said Eagle; "he puff with Hip Sing Tong men Dupont Street long time. My fliend." The Chinese grunted and passed them. Eagle led the way along a basement hall divided by wooden compartments into little numbered rooms like bath-houses. An odorous smoke hung heavy over them all. "No private rooms for us," said Eagle; "too much fun in the big one."

At the end of the passage was a massive door with a Judas hole, the slide of which went down at his knock. "Hello, Kid," said somebody, and admitted them. "The Four Hundred Kid," explained the somebody to another man who stood near, "Harry the Bee." Winthrop recognized in the man introduced the name of a notorious burglar, but Eagle shook hands, well pleased. He had forgotten Winthrop's name, so he presented him as "Jim Wilson," by which the underworld was to know Winthrop well. There were many others in the room besides the burglar and the doorman; a steady hum of conversation arose from them, as they lay, in couples, one on each side of a little lamp, a long bamboo pipe passing from one to the other. Each couple had a bunk, the bunks being built against the wall in tiers, upper and lower, like a Pullman sleeping car, but wider. Sometimes three or even four lay on one bunk, each head pillowed on the hip of him, or her, above him. The one on the upper right-hand side was the "cook:" scraping chocolate-colored stuff from a playing card, toasting it over the flame of the

cottonseed oil lamps, kneading it on the clay pipebowl, then breaking it into little pills, each one being affixed to the bowl and drawn through it in the form of smoke. Winthrop, knowing this was opium, kept back a shudder with difficulty.

An individual in felt slippers and cotton-wadded pajamas arranged their bunk, put down the tray holding the lighted lamp, and motioned them to the wall side. Winthrop choked over the first "pill" cooked for him, burning it, much to the "cook's" disgust; over the second, too: but with the others he was more successful, and, when he had cleansed his mouth of the taste by eating sliced oranges, lay back in a condition of joyous repose. He had neither dreams nor hallucinations; instead, he was extraordinarily sane; his body drugged, his mind seemed released from a clog and soared into immensity to meet Eagle's. The two fell into a metaphysical discussion, during which Winthrop found words to express all his doubts and fears and, in glad surprise, solutions, explanations. He felt an immense superiority to that dull workaday world that knew nothing of life's great secrets. It was as though, with Eagle, he lay like a god on a cloud, half pitying, half contemptuous of this sorry planet. Suddenly he realized why he had never got on with people: he was not of their kind; he was a Superman. Now, he knew, it was beneath him to mingle with their petty hates and strivings. Eternity was too near. Having ceased to care for the good will of these people, a dozen brilliant schemes came to his head by which he might outgeneral them and, through their stupidities, become rich. But he scorned to do so: perhaps . . . some day . . . maybe . . . if he felt like it . . .

Eagle, meanwhile, had closed his eyes and would speak no more. He dealt in no vague generalities. He was using his heightened faculties to work out some connected thoughts that would make a story. Presently he rose, and hastened

home to write it before the sleepiness of the drugged should descend upon him.

But Winthrop still lay dreaming of a greatness he would never do anything to achieve.

III

EAGLE encouraged Winthrop to write, and, as he must do something, he turned out some pretentious carelessly written impossibilities good only for the cheaper grade of fiction magazines. To live decently by such work, he must produce in prodigious quantities, and this he was unwilling to do when he could lie in Sam Toy's big room dreaming or listening to amusing or interesting people. Sam Toy's was the inner heart of the city. Its frequenters knew the truth about everything: how millionaire Banks had really died; what the wife of young Edgar Pynsent, 3rd, had been before he married her; how the King of the Street had been fleeced at cards; what really happened behind Fifth Avenue doors, Broadway stage entrances and Wall Street cashiers' cages. These frequenters regarded life frankly as a battle; and here was their only bivouac. Not only crooks came: "burglars," "wire men," "match men," "lemon men"—the line was drawn at pickpockets and cadets—but famous "square" people: a "star" whose name glittered on Broadway, once an A. D. T. messenger; a theatrical magnate formerly a newsboy; the wife of a trust official, an ex-chorus girl; others, well known in the upper world. But here no attempt was made to rob or defraud them—this was a common refuge. A curious freemasonry existed among its frequenters; the "star," the magnate and the erstwhile chorus girl took the same pleasure in telling the truth about themselves as do peasants at confession.

Eagle drank in all details eagerly—he would never talk if he could listen; and so the explanation of many world-famous mysteries became his. He found that he need be ashamed no longer of the double dealings to which he had been forced, to raise himself from poverty. Under the opium's lulling influence, his own story was repeated a hundred times, with only dates and names different. It was another strand in his philosophy of life. He would lie very still and try to connect it with others . . . never mind; it would come some day. A pretty show-girl, entering, yawning over the memory of a supper-party with rich bankers, would exhibit a fifty-dollar bill such as each girl had found under her plate. And some banker, probably, had a sore heart because she would not let him escort her home. . . . That was life. He strove to understand it. . . . On another side of him was a quiet-voiced young fellow who had served three years for stealing a watch; while, down in Wall Street to-day, the promoters of worthless mining-stock or building-lots could steal hundreds of thousands of the savings of shop-girls and washerwomen and never do a day. Life again. Why? Could one *ever* understand it? . . . But sometimes he had a gleam, and hurried home to write it down.

People were asking themselves the same questions all over America. "Rotten colonel, rotten regiment," say army men; and as money colonels were thieves, thievery had not come to be regarded either lightly, or as retaliation or defense. It seemed only the latter to the indignant Winthrop, writing his daily thousands of worthless words to please haberdashers and milkmen: words that ignored all great realities and pretended America was the greatest country on earth and Americans the cleverest, noblest, bravest and most magnanimous. Winthrop's heart sickened at the task, but he never thought to aspire to a style in which he could disguise the truth, as Eagle did. So he waded on through his morass of sentiment-

talities and spreadeagleism: and, just as weak people read his stories to drug themselves into unconsciousness of actual evil, so Winthrop sought a stronger drug. He was a giant in repose, a pigmy in action; consequently his moments of repose lengthened at the expense of his livelihood. There came a time when he was ashamed to ask Eagle for further loans, and soon he had enlisted in the army of actual rebellion: assistant to a "scratch man," a person who raises small checks and banknotes. These Winthrop cashed or passed, his gentlemanly appearance his invaluable asset.

But it is doubtful whether or not Winthrop would ever have had the initiative to become a crook had Eagle not already succumbed to temptation. The novelist had come to a point in his literary career where he was no longer willing to compromise; where he objected to deleting from his stories, for the benefit of hypocritical, squeamish or ignorant readers, certain aspects of life that seemed to him important, that he believed the public should know. Eagle thought he had arrived at a solution of life's cruelties and was eager to impart it to the growing number of those who followed his work, but, when he wrote along these lines, the editors lectured him severely and bade him return to the style proven tried and true. In a series of bitterly denunciatory scenes, Eagle swore he would write no more until he could write his own way. He flamed into open rebellion long before Winthrop, but for a far different reason.

In his new state of mind, he had stated openly to his friends at Sam Toy's that it was the duty of anyone with an ounce of spirit to urge the people generally to play the same game the capitalists were playing; showing them the anarchy that would result were everyone as dishonest, unscrupulous and heartless as they. There were certain "wire men," alternating high-class blackmailing with their "phony" pool-rooms, who were very happy to hear this from Eagle.

Often he had helped them solve knotty problems by purely psychological methods of reasoning, and they envied literature the possession of his clear head and unusual brain. And, although they were practical business men, untouched by anarchical or socialistic sentiments, they found it convenient to assume all the theories of the indignant young sociologist. Night after night Eagle talked at Sam Toy's; night after night they listened and approved. Then, like a flower, from bud to blossom, they allowed to grow before him a scheme which, in magnitude, did justice to Eagle's desire for reprisal: a scheme that had slumbered in the brain of "Dude" Horan for years, because it necessitated the coöperation of someone free of police suspicion, someone who had access to a higher grade of society than that in which the Dude's intimates were comfortable. Eagle was just the man.

It was not a pretty scheme, nor in the least romantic, so its details shall not be given here; but it was masterly: its conclusion being that a certain power in the Street was to find himself in a cellar, there to remain for ransom—or so they told Eagle. As a matter of fact, the tribute exacted, the hostage was to be eliminated to avoid the chance of speedy retribution once he was free. . . . Such bloodthirstiness in men is awakened only for adequate reasons; the crook is the most sentimental of men, and that very sentimentality had been outraged in this case: babies had died for want of the ice that would have been theirs had not "he" raised the price.

Eagle was the link connecting the upper and under worlds: for other accomplices must be obtained: an actress, a taxi-driver, a show-girl, a hotel clerk, a stenographer—many more. Eagle obtained them. All went without a hitch until the very day, when "he" went to play golf. Then the thunderbolt. There had been a Judas in their midst.

Eagle, alone of all the conspirators, was released on bail

because at that time he was regarded as more sinned against than sinning; and, while this state of mind existed among the district attorneys, he fled to France and hid himself in the heart of the Pyrenees, his bondsman, an admirer, giving permission. And for many years the world heard no more of Anson Eagle.

IV

MEANWHILE Winthrop pursued his less spectacular career. Perhaps all would have gone well enough had ambition slumbered; but Winthrop had little to do save spend a few hours in shops and banks, leaving more time for Sam Toy's and his dreams. Eagle's arrest and flight were triumphs in Winthrop's eyes; quotations from his writings appeared in the newspapers, and those inclined to Socialism disguised their sympathy but thinly, the Socialist organs openly approving. Two months later, a trust-promoter's child was kidnaped, and Eagle's name was whispered as behind it. Romantic pictures of him and his possible band, hiding somewhere subterraneously, filled Sunday supplements. Winthrop's heart leaped high as he read these fallacious tales written by highly paid "feature men" but signed with the names of well-known criminals; and he would lie around the layout by the hour working out subtle schemes to achieve Eagle's eminence. Winthrop saw in him, at one time, the soul of a Martin Luther or a John Knox allied with the exploits of a Francis Drake or a Robin Hood; but, worst of all, he still saw Eagle only as his own avatar, the man he himself could be if he chose to exert himself. So he began to talk brilliantly, too, as he had heard Eagle talk, and in that assembly of lawless ones it was not long before he found followers for another plot against a plutocrat's peace. But he was no Eagle for advice, and he had no Horan for execution. It was not

necessary for a traitor to betray this sorry scheme; it betrayed itself by slipshod carelessness.

Nor, in any way, did the trial for conspiracy of Winthrop and his accomplices resemble even slightly that of his hero's. Again lacking an Eagle, or even a Horan, to flavor it with Sunday-supplement romance, it went briefly recorded as a commonplace crime; so the judge was not moved by public opinion to consider charging the jury with reasonable doubt; and the jury saw in the accused company not possible champions of the proletariat but ordinary "blackhanders." The sentences were heavy; and Winthrop was hustled away to ugly gray clothes and high gray stone walls.

V

At that time, Eagle, roughly clad but hale and hearty, bronzed and ruddy, was breasting the snow of the mountains; and as he climbed he sang. There was nothing about him to suggest the man of the world, the *boulevardier*, not even a cynical droop of the eye. He had lived in these mountains for a year now. As he had listened to the stories of criminals' lives, now he listened to peasants' tales of another under-world, abandoning himself to mystical fancies. He was as a child again among these simple folk. In his little mountain hut, on bookshelves that he had built himself, were the works of the master mystics, modern and medieval. He read now with the eyes of the spirit, and was astounded to find he had never really read before. Perhaps, had his money lasted, he would not have written again; but even a simple life costs, so he began a novel. So long free of civilization's standards, so long removed from the taint of cities, his work was as that of another man; and each evening when he read in the dusk the work of the day he was amazed. His mysticism had crystallized life, and explained what had been its inconsistencies; so he dealt no longer in detached incidents but in

those that were the keys of the mystery. He saw humanity, one great troubled giant, clumsy, ignorant, sad and helpless, reaching out with a hundred hands ever after an ideal and finding false ones to worship fiercely. He saw it in a thicket of thorns, struggling wildly to be free, thrashing out with its hundred arms, not knowing that living creatures fell dead from its blows. He heard it, crying, like a lost child, upon the Hill of Golgotha, crying for God, its father, whom it could not find.

VI

So all that he had sought to know was revealed to him; and the book, begun for money, was finished for love. In it were men of all kinds among whom his life had been led; he wrote them down as he had known them, but, also, he looked into their hearts for what had made them so, and, finding that those hearts were very much as was his own, attacked no men but only conditions and creeds. His experiences had not been wasted: he knew how one man felt under absinthe, another under opium, a third under the braggadocio influence of false heroism, a fourth under the sway of sex. Suddenly he perceived that he had been Everyman; he was no longer ashamed he had sinned, since he might help a million weaklings who never would have found their way to the Delectable Mountains had such as he not made maps of gins and pitfalls. He had lived to save others; himself alone he could not save.

When the book was finished and he had stumbled along many weary miles to send it safely to his agent, starvation and cold had not left him the strength to regain his mountains, and he raved in delirium, at the foot of them, in a kindly peasant's hut. When he recovered, he worked in the fields and chopped wood in return for his host's attendance during his illness.

VII

HIS book was refused by all the leading London publishers; finally, in despair, his literary agent gave it to a young disciple of William Morris who wanted text which would fit in with the medieval beauty of his specially designed fonts and Preraphaelite illustrations. The fact that it sold by subscription only, at a guinea the volume, compelled the press to take it seriously. So Eagle, under his pseudonym, got pages in weekly periodicals, double columns in dailies; and soon the booksellers demanded a trade-price edition; they were tired of denying customers who demanded it. Philanthropists, literary guilds and society women made the book the subject of discussions, essays and debates; and Socialists and suffragists used its teachings as propaganda. With the American reprints, many editions were exhausted, not as many as a "best seller," to be true, but sufficient to reach all the intelligent people in the English-speaking world: less than a hundred thousand. It was read alike in the church and the disorderly house; in editorial rooms and boarding-schools. For it had not been written by one who had bought his seat at the Theater of Life and therefore knew nothing of what happens beyond the stage door, but by one who had lived behind the scenes; and therefore it had a message for everyone. In it one who understood might have discovered the secret of the difference between Eagle and Winthrop: without knowing it, Eagle had been fighting for others all his life, Winthrop only for himself.

VIII

ONE day the Chinese at Sam Toy's slammed the iron door in Winthrop's face. Since his release from Sing Sing, he had taxed the patience of its frequenters. He had not dared

break laws again with the menace of that horrible prison life behind each dereliction; so, lacking money, he had slept around any layout where he happened to be, and borrowed the money for his food. Had he possessed a more pleasing temper, doubtless, as reward for running errands for fruit, cigarettes and reading matter, the good-natured crooks and their friends would have supported him interminably; but his opinion of his importance had undergone no change. He alternated between whining for loans and asserting his dignity: he would compare himself, his birth, education and breeding with those who lacked all three, and he would work himself up into insensate rages against capitalism whenever he read the newspapers, annoying everyone in the room, for in such places they like to lie quietly, forgetting travail in perfect to-morrows. He quarreled with everyone, sneering at innocent boasts and discounting tall tales, moreover suspecting insults in every unintentional ambiguity. So finally Sam Toy had tired of him; his door never opened to Winthrop again.

For some little while the former reporter, suddenly realizing his degradation, made an earnest effort to take himself in hand. He found a former friend who gave him a place to sleep and some cast-off clothes, tolerably presentable; who got him work at the City News office, where assignments at two dollars each are given out twice a day. But to suffer careless treatment at the hands of people of whose intelligence he was contemptuous, to take their orders; to endure the insults of those in the news, infuriated with reporters who distorted personal misfortunes into spicy scandal: all this was too much for one who gave himself the stature of the Napoleon of his dreams. Then, too, he must often work twelve hours for four dollars, in all sorts of inclement weather, on nights freezingly cold.

So he dropped out after a few weeks, and tried to write fiction again; but the only style he had ever troubled to acquire was too journalistic for the weighty things he wanted

to say; besides, he was a monomaniac, hating all prosperous people.

His money gave out; he was evicted; and sank, sank, sank, until he could sink no lower. But he did not realize how low it was: he knew only that he ate, smoked and did not work. . . . Then, one day, after many months of slothful living in an overheated Tenderloin apartment, seldom leaving the bunk, a bitter quarrel, which had waged for weeks between him and his companion, had its culmination in a fallen body on the floor, a stream of blood across its forehead. . . .

Winthrop fled into the snowy streets; he shivered at the sight of the nearest policeman. A vision came of gray stone walls, horrible scratchy gray suits, iron bars between him and the sun. . . . At any time a heavy hand might fall on his shoulder; in another day, at most, someone would be sure to force open the door of the apartment and see what lay there so quietly.

He hurriedly registered at the nearest hotel, a cheap one. Then it occurred to him that it might not be death back there. . . . He was elated—until his gaze met the greasy wallpaper of the hotel bedroom, his nose became conscious of the smelly mattress—and outside the snow was falling. . . . His choice lay between those cold streets, the only place he could earn a living—for he knew now he was fit to be an underpaid reporter or nothing; and in reward for his labors just such a room as this—this the end of his dreams of honor and power. Not even the comfort of the flat he had just left, the leisure, the good food, to which he could never go back. "Oh, Dolly, I didn't mean to do it!" he sobbed wildly. But he was not sobbing for the girl but for himself: her death did not hang heavy on his soul—only the punishment it brought him. Always it was Winthrop, the hero of the great play in the Theater of Life; and because the universe would not revolve about him, how sorry was the universe! . . . Always himself.

IX

UP the mountains toiled a party of pilgrims bearing a pardon to Anson Eagle. Powerful people had read his book, and their glowing appreciation had encouraged his agent to confide to some the author's secret. They would see it was all a mistake, and should not such a stain be removed from his name so that he could return to his own country and be honored, fêted, an ornament at rich women's house parties and dinners, a newspaper hero once more? It had not been necessary to bring much pressure to bear on the District Attorney after he, too, had read the book. "If the gentleman will return and plead 'guilty'—a suspended sentence can be arranged." It was a nominal term for absolute pardon, he wrote almost apologetically. But as a matter of form . . .

They had journeyed hastily to take him home, his agent, his English and American publishers, the special representative of a chain of sensational newspapers, an Associated Press correspondent and a moving-picture magnate.

Eagle gave them bread and mountain cheese and milk. He was surrounded by books and stacks of manuscript, and was dressed as peasants are. He seemed quite unaffected by their praise and by the prospect of his pardon.

"No," he said, "my books mustn't bear the handicap of my name. They weren't written by Anson Eagle. Their author was born up here." He waved to the mountain tops affectionately. "Why should I go to New York? I'd only be unhappy there, surrounded by misery I can't prevent, helpless with anger at outrages I couldn't stop. I'd be an anarchist again. You'll always get the best of me in my books. Let me stay here and have a little happiness with the best companions of four thousand years"—he nodded lovingly toward his books—"and with work, much work. Why, if I wrote from now on steadily until I died I shouldn't have written

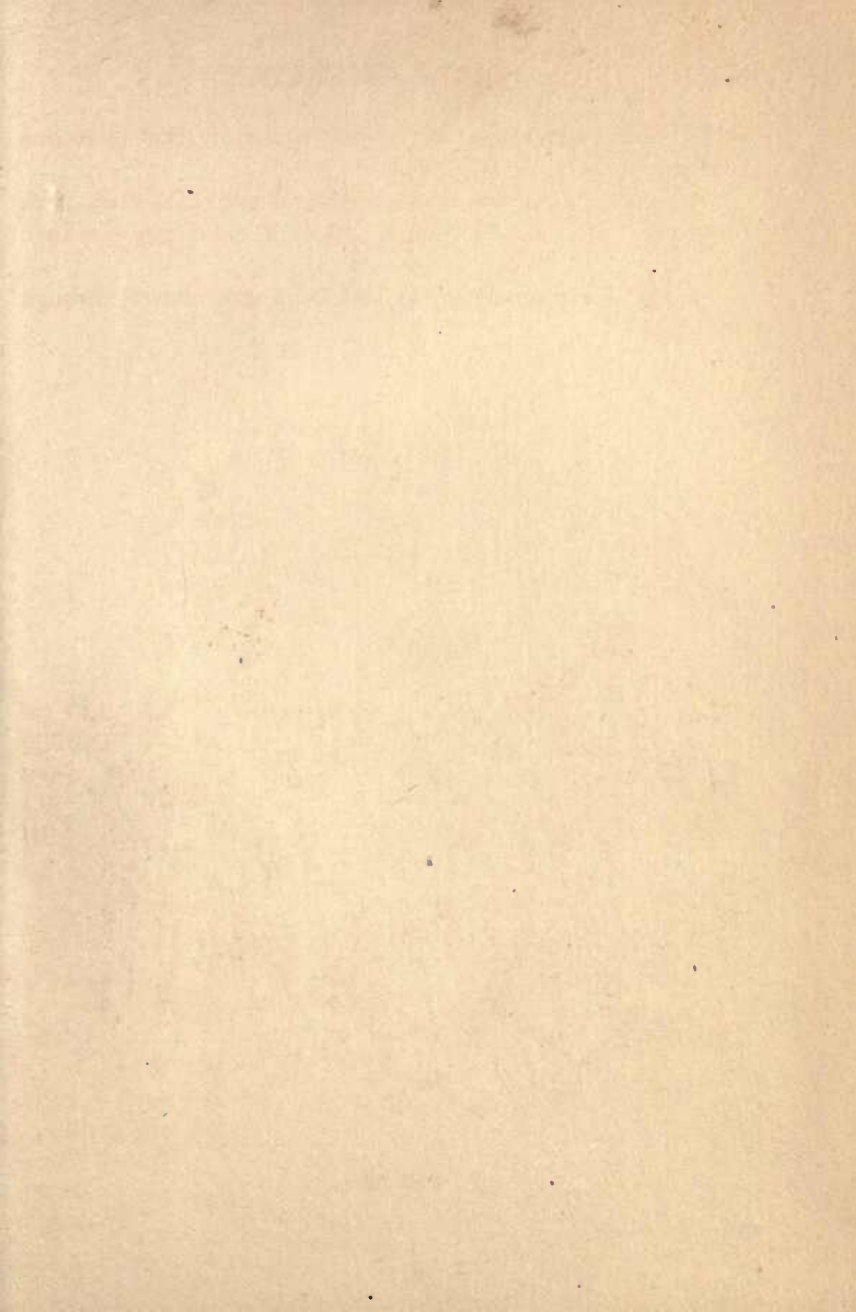
half I've learned myself or a thousandth of what Someone Else has taught me—*up here.*"

He seemed always to speak of the mountains as men speak of beloved and sacred things. "Thank God!" he finished.

At that same moment, Asa Winthrop shot himself through the heart.



THE END.



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